



**LIFE AND WORKS
OF
PREMCHAND**

MANOHAR BANDOPADHYAY

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of
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by
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For
K.N. JOHRY

About the Author

Manohar Bandopadhyay(b. 1941) is a noted Indo-English poet and critic who has extensively written on Hindi and Indo-English writings in numerous dailies, journals and anthologies. He has translated a large number of Hindi works into English and has introduced many Hindi poets to English reading world through translations and critical articles. His translation of Jaya Shankar Prasad's *Kamayani* into rhymed English has been commended in India and abroad. He has also broadcast talks on Indian literature from All India Radio, Delhi.

Educated variously in Madhya Pradesh (Ashoknagar), Bombay and Pune, Manohar Bandopadhyay is a post graduate in Hindi and English literatures. He had a chequered career as a teacher, translator and journalist. He is currently editing "Foodcorp", the house journal of Food Corporation of India in New Delhi.

His works include *Sighs And Sorrows* (1970), *Song of Delhi And Other Poems* (1977). *Kamayani* (translation-1978). *Runaway Cow* (translation-1979) and a collection of original Hindi verses, *Sooney Chaurahey Par* (1980). An anthology of contemporary Indo-English poetry edited by him is shortly due to be released.

PREFACE

This book asserts no claim to the scholarship of Premchand literature. There are numerous books available in Hindi which deal with many aspects of Premchand's writings including his life. Among them I must single out two books which are a veritable treasure to all readers of Premchand's life and works. These are *Premchand: Qalam Ka Sipahi* by Amritrai and *Premchand Ghar Mein* by Shivrani Devi. They are in Hindi and their translation into English is very much desirable since the works of Premchand are now world classics and there is demand everywhere to know more about the author and his writings. Needless to say I have used these two reference books in writing this volume for which I am immensely grateful to their authors.

As will be seen in the following pages, this book is meant primarily for the general readers. It was, therefore, necessary to give a comprehensive information so that the readers do not have to rush for other books for immediate reference. In this context I had to be somewhat inclusive in the discussions of the major works of Premchand. Plots of novels and a handful of familiar short stories have been summarised with a view that the readers appreciate the theme, treatment and artistic skill of Premchand with the assistance of necessary backdrop. There has been also an attempt to evaluate Premchand's thoughts on society, politics and literature in the context of his works. I have been, however, in a vulnerable position since in the scope and dimension of this book, economy has been the deciding factor and it has not been possible to discuss the myriad other aspects of the works and life of Premchand. Premchand wrote so exuberantly that he never had time or desire to keep an up to date record of his publications about which there are diverse opinions about their chronology. I have indebtedly drawn upon Amritrai's book referred to earlier since his information is more authentic.

This book was virtually written during October-November 1980 at the time of Premchand's centenary celebrations and it gives me special satisfaction that the book is being published during the centenary year as a mark of

tribute to the great novelist that India has produced. The demands made on a work of this nature are too numerous to satisfy the needs of the specialists, but then, as has been indicated earlier, this has not been the guiding purpose in these pages. Premchand wrote for the masses and it would be a great homage to the novelist if the masses of readers, that is to say, the general readers are able to benefit from the volume in satisfying their basic enquiry about the great writer. Obviously, therefore, I have avoided as far as possible the critical dialectics of Premchand's works since it might obstruct their genuine appreciation.

I have consulted various books to which I was able to have my access and I sincerely desire to express my gratefulness to their authors. The compilation of Premchand's letters *Chitthi Patri*, edited by Amitrai and Madan Gopal has been of added value for the material of this book for which I wish to extend my thanks to the compilers with gratitude. Thanks are due to Mr S. C. Bhatt, Director and Dr S. S. Shashi, Joint Director of Publications Division as also the Publications Division itself who have provided me the opportunity for this monograph. I wish to thank Mr V. V. Prasad for going through the text and rendering valuable suggestions for improvement. Thanks are also due to Dr Narendra Mohan for making available certain source material for this book. I am indebted to Miss Veera Wali for her speedy and efficient assistance to complete the book bearing patiently as she did to organise the written material despite its illegibility and common cussedness. My wife, Kamlesh who has helped me at all stages and bore cheerfully all my domestic neglect, too deserves a word of gratitude for this effort.

New Delhi,
December, 1980

MANOHAR BANDOPADHYAY

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Prelude : The Early Life

Premchand's place in Hindi literature is synonymous with Hindi fiction. Any reflection on Hindi fiction at least till the middle of this century begins and ends with Premchand. His contribution to the *genre* is of supreme historical importance not only for his pioneering ability to make a living language (Hindustani) the medium of expression but also for his subject matter and the craft of fiction writing. His was the three dimensional gift to the Hindi fiction. With his warm and affectionate treatment of the rural world he wrote the novels for the masses, not as one writing for them but as one writing from among them.

Even as the Hindi novel has made rapid strides in form, technique and content, Premchand's relevance today is nonetheless of sovereign significance even forty years after his death. He picked up Hindi fiction in the state of almost pre-Fielding English novel and cruising through that of Charles Dickens and Thackeray left his impress somewhere around Hardy. And although a late arrival on the world novel scene, the Hindi novel today can claim equality anywhere in the world for which the author of the rural masses in India, Munshi Premchand will be remembered for all time to come.

In 1882 when Premchand was just a two-year old child, the first Hindi novel *Pariksha Guru* by Lala Shrinivas Das had appeared offering something 'new' to the Hindi readers. Eight years later in 1890, Devakinandan Khatri published his novel, *Chandrakanta Santati* which at once became a craze with Hindi readers. For this success some critics regard Devakinandan Khatri as the first Hindi Novelist. Gopal Ram Gahmari and Kartik Prasad Khatri also published their novels around this period which bear the influence of Bengali fiction. In 1898 Kishorilal Goswami launched a monthly journal "Upanyas" (Novel) in which as many as sixtyfive novels of Goswami were published. The novels of Brijnandan Sahay were nothing more than lyrical narratives.

Most of these works, however, were either journeying into wilderness of imagination of fable sermons for preaching ideals. There were absurd

detective works to satiate sensuous tastes of the readers. These had no realism to offer worth the name. There was total anarchy in structure and unity of construction. Characterization was unknown. The novelists had no specific objectives for their craft. Nor was there any attempt to inform the reader about his ambience, much less about the country. No author of realism could afford to ignore the political consciousness that had begun to surface all over the country. Premchand opened this new vista and it was he who startled his readers with his stories and novels of down-to-earth reality relevant to the every day life of his readers.

With his minute realism he also offered his definite ideals to his readers and provoked them to think. He came to Hindi world from Urdu where he was as successful as he was in later years in Hindi and brought with him a rich heritage in Hindi. His period in Hindi writing (1918-1936) spanned not even twenty years but within these years he enriched Hindi fiction to such an extent that no other author in the language can claim to rival him. He lent form and unity to the raw structure as he found it and created characters full of life. Changing the taste of the readers he made the novel a reading matter for the masses for entertainment as well as social and political awareness. Right at the incipient state of his writing his works brim with nationalism calling implicitly for revolt against foreign domination. He was at once challenged by the foreign ruler who feared that his writings could explode the simmering fire of revolution to demolish the British rule from the country. Premchand, however, withstood the challenge against all odds firmly and wrote with full vigour and warmth dreaming of the day when “my country is freed of foreign yoke.”

This epoch making novelist, Munshi Premchand was born on Saturday, 31st July, 1880 at Lamahi, a village some four miles from Varanasi on the road to Azamgarh. The road to Lamahi has now been named in honour of the novelist as “Premchand Marg”. Munshi Premchand, however, was not known to his readers by this name until 1910. This is his pseudonym for Dhanpatrai, his parental name. His uncle called him affectionately Nawab rai which he used for sometime in his writings until 1910. After the publication of his first short story collection *Soze-e-Watan* (1908) he had run into trouble with the British government who found his stories extremely seditious. To escape the notice of the government therefore he assumed the name Premchand which was suggested by Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam, the editor of the renowned Urdu journal, “Zamana.”

Premchand belonged to Shrivastava branch of Kayasthas who had acquired eminence in administrative ability since the Moghul days. His ancestors lived at Airay, a village near Lamahi. His grandfather Munshi Gursahaylal was posted to Lamahi as patwari (village accountant or land recorder). Munshi Gursahaylal's family seems to have lived prosperously. Since he had acquired in course of time some sixty bighas (about thirty-eight acres) of land in the village. Munshi Gursahaylal had four sons, Kauleswarlal, Mahavirlal, Ajaiblal and Udit Narainlal. Munshi Gursahaylal had bequeathed the lands to Mahavirlal who was a sturdy youth and capable enough to convince the father about his ability to keep the lands in possession. He was, however, deceived by a distant relation, after the death of the father. Consequently the children lost the possession of the lands. The only property left over with the four brothers was some six bighas of land which Munshi Gursahaylal had willed for Baldevlal, the son of Mahavirlal. While Mahavirlal lived on farming the other brothers had to look for government jobs for their livelihood. Eventually all the three took up jobs in postal department.

Munshi Ajaiblal began his career as a postal clerk at a monthly salary of ten rupees. His salary was forty rupees a month before his retirement. He was a simple hearted man and was respected in the village for his steadfastness and discrete behaviour. He had studied scriptures but was not an orthodox believer of religion; with greater respect to chaste and moral living than religious ostentations. His wife Anandi was not only a charming lady but also equally a modest, thorough-bred woman sensitively charitable towards the poor folks of the village. Sadly, however, two daughters born to them had died in infancy. The third child born at Lamahi, a daughter, survived and later came to be known as Suggi. After six or seven years was born the fourth child, Premchand who was the only son of the couple. Naturally he was very much doted upon by his mother. He was handsome. The noble lady however could not bestow her love and affection on the child for long.

Munshi Ajaiblal was transferred in 1883 to Banda where the child Premchand also accompanied the father. His father had to move to several places on transfers. It was necessary, therefore, for the child to stay at Lamahi for his primary education. He was seven or eight years when he began learning Urdu and Persian from a Maulvi Sahib in village Lalpur, about a mile away from Lamahi. Premchand used to go on foot. Maulvi Sahib was a tailor by profession but he also ran the school (madarsa) for children to earn extra money. He was a scholar in the two languages. Premchand learnt the

languages as also their literatures for some years. It is interesting to note that the greatest of the Hindi novelists did not begin his education with Hindi but Urdu and Persian. Premchand later recounted his early experience as a student in his story “Chori” (Theft) published in “Madhuri” in 1925, very powerfully.

Premchand lost his mother at a tender age of eight. His mother died after a prolonged illness in Allahabad. His sister Suggi was then about 15. She was married and had come to her parental home a week before the mother's death. Thereafter began a series of unhappy events in the child's life which are quite common for the motherless children in most Indian households. In about two years after his mother's death his father married. Premchand left Lamahi to live with the step mother in Gorakhpur. His father had to move again to several places on transfers; longest ever period being at Gorakhpur where Premchand passed his eighth standard from Mission High school. He had, however, no interest in academic books. He delighted in reading Urdu novels and read the best pieces available at the time. He had in the meanwhile fallen into bad company. Away from step mother's tyranny in the house he would spend time in sports with friends for most of the time. He took to smoking and at the tender age of thirteen had learnt “such things which is dangerous for the children at that age.” He had his first inspiration to write at Jimapur where his father was posted in 1892. At this place, a certain tobacco dealer's son became his friend and the two boys would sit daylong behind the tobacco heaps. They would smoke hukka and devour the pages of Faizi's *Tilasm-e-Hoshrubah*. This massive Urdu saga which ran into some 17 volumes then was a restless craze among Urdu readers at the time. Premchand too, like the children of his age could not resist the temptation of the novel's enjoyment. He read Mirza Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* and the humorous works of Maulana Sajjad Hussain. But then more than the pleasure from such novels he derived strength and inspiration from them since in subsequent years he was to make much use of it in his own plot construction as is primarily seen in his early works which have not totally overlooked the entertainment aspect for the readers. Years later he wrote about his experience of this period in his essay. “My first work” :

“I was then about 13. I didn't know Hindi at all. I developed a great passion then, to read Urdu novels. Maulana Sharar, Ratan Nath Sarsar, Mirza Ruswa and Maulwi Mohammed Ali of Hardoi were at the time the most popular novelists. Whenever I had an opportunity to read their novels, I

forgot all about school and could not rest until I had finished the novel I had laid my hand on. In those days Reynold's novels were very popular. Urdu translations of his novels were then selling like hot cake. I also loved his novels. In two or three years I might have read some hundred of them.”

Premchand was stimulated to write himself at this time and he attempted a satire on the brother of his step mother who fell in love with a low-caste domestic servant and was beaten badly by the villagers on the discovery of his love affair. It is supposed to have been written in 1893. It is untraceable today in original form. Next year he wrote a play, *Honhar Virwan Ke Hot Cheeckney Pat* (Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before).

Premchand had to stay at Lamahi when his father was posted from Gorakhpur to Jamania. He took his admission in Queen's College in Varanasi. He was studying in the ninth standard now. His school fees had been exempted. He thought he would be able to manage all his expenses in five rupees which his father gave him every month as per his own request. But later he found it was not possible to get on with this paltry sum. To add to this allowance he took up a tuition job to coach a boy at Bansfatak in Varanasi. He would reach home at about eight in the evening after his own studies in the school and coaching the boy. He would walk to the village on foot. Then in the night he sat for his studies over a kerosene lamp. He was now fifteen years old. The father began to look for a suitable bride. His step mother's father suggested a girl in village Rampur some ten miles from Basti. The proposal was accepted. It was an hour of excitement for the boy who cut with great delight bamboos to erect his own marriage rostrum. The marriage soon turned out to be an unhappy one. Not that the girl was of dark complexion and ill looking but she was older than the boy too. She was of fiery temperament and ill behaved. Premchand has described his first experience after marriage in the following manner:

“Finally the time came for our departure from her home... We had to travel in a camel cart. When we got down from the camel cart, my wife held my hand and began to walk with me. I wasn't prepared for this. It upset me very much. In the end when I saw her face, my blood curdled.”

In his famous biography of Premchand entitled *Premchand Qalam Ka Sipahi*, Premchand's son, Amritrai has described her features in vivid details: “Her appearance was displeasing, ugly, fat, slatternly... There were glaring scars of small pox on her face. Her one leg was shorter than the other for

which the unfortunate girl had to walk limpingly....” She used to have fits often and was quarrelsome. When Premchand’s father learnt about this he was awfully upset for being deceived in this unsuitable match for his handsome son. His Ajaiblal’s health failed and he remained ill for several months. Within one and a half year of the son’s marriage, he died at the age of fifty six.

Yet however Premchand bore it calmly though he could not get along well because of his wife’s quarrelsome behaviour and nagging feud in the household. There were perennial skirmishes between her and the step mother. Premchand himself was already worried to maintain the family as the responsibility had fallen on his shoulders at the tender age of fifteen. She stayed for over some three or four years at Lamahi but when Premchand had to move out on his employment to Chunar she left for her parents’ home where she had been already staying at frequent intervals during this while. She scarcely visited Lamahi since after.

Any way Premchand had his own problems. He had been dreaming to do M.A. and become a lawyer after acquiring a law degree. These hopes crumbled when he was confronted with the burden of feeding the family; his wife, the step mother and her two sons (Gulab and Mahtab) in addition to himself. He had not yet done matriculation. He was to appear for the examination in 1897, the year his father expired. Next year he appeared for the examination and passed out in second division. The family feuds and the worry of earning had obviously jeopardised his studies. His fees in the Queen’s College could not be exempted for further studies, as he did not obtain a first division.

He made up his mind to try his luck in the Hindu College which was founded that very year. He met the Principal of the college, Mr. Richardson whom he found in his house clad in *dhoti* and *kurta* sitting “cross-legged on the floor.” The Principal did sympathise with the boy but he demanded some recommendation for the admission. Premchand then met Thakur Indranarayan Singh who was in the executive body of the Hindu College and secured a recommendation. He was however down with fever and could not meet the Principal for quite some days. Even after delay when the Principal saw the recommendation he was sympathetic and asked for the test for admission. The English teacher found him ‘satisfactory’ but the Algebra teacher recorded ‘unsatisfactory’ on the form. In utter despair Premchand couldn’t go to see the Principal; he left for home. Admittedly he was weak in

mathematics. “Mathematics for me,” he confessed later, “was like Gauri Shankar’s peak which I could never climb.”

Evidently for him there was no alternative except to improve mathematics to be able to prosecute his studies further. He, therefore, resolved to devote a year to prepare the subject well. He succeeded to get a coaching job to teach children of a lawyer on a monthly fee of five rupees. He would handover three rupees to his step-mother in the village and live on two rupees the whole month. He lived in the mud cell over the lawyer’s stable and cooked his own food (khichri) one time after which he walked straight to the library. “A small kerosene lamp and some utensils were all I had.” He visited the library every morning where he read sumptuously the *Fasan-e-Azad* of Pandit Ratannath Sarshar, *Chandrakanta Santati* of Devaki-nandan Khatri, Urdu translation of Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s Bengali novels and all that were available in the library. In spite of all the efforts he had made to improve his mathematics, he couldn’t develop any interest in the dry numericals. Instinctively he was doing homework for the great novels he was to write in later years.

More often than not Premchand had to borrow money as it was not possible to manage in two rupees for the entire month. Unable to repay the loan in time he had to put up with great agony and had to avoid the notice of the money-lenders for fear of public insult. He took three years to pay two and half rupees to a cloth merchant from whom he had bought some clothes. A gardener whom he taught Hindi, recovered the eight annas he had borrowed from him after five years and “walked all the way to my village in order to do so.” Debts some how or other continued to be an endless problem in his life for most of the period particularly in the later years. The creditor’s cruel and the borrower’s helpless plight constitute the recurrent themes in his novels for which he had a first hand experience in his own life.

II

Beginning of Teaching Career

Premchand was ardently looking for some job to get over the immediate excruciating economic problem. Accidentally on a certain evening of 1899 winter when, nothing to eat, he had to sell his arithmetic cram book to a bookseller, his fortune dawned. As he was stepping out of the shop he met a “large moustached kind-looking man” who inquired if he wanted a job. The gentleman was the headmaster of a missionary school in Chunar in Mirzapur district some forty miles from Varanasi known for its strong fort and the Vindhyachal ranges. He was looking for a matriculate teacher for his school. He offered Premchand a teacher’s job in his school at eighteen rupees a month which was a wild dream in his most penurious days. He accepted it instantly and within a couple of days he left for Chunar along with his step mother, her brother Vijay Bahadur and his step brother, Mahtab Gulab, the elder son of his step mother had died a few years earlier.

At Chunar Premchand fell a victim of school politics. He could not remain passive when some injustice was being done to one of his fellow teachers and supported his cause. Consequently both the teachers had to lose their job. Premchand came back to Varanasi in search of some new job.

In July 1900 he was appointed assistant teacher in the district school, Bahraich on a monthly salary of rupees twenty. A few months later he was transferred to Pratapgarh. His mother stayed at Lamahi with her son and the brother. Premchand sent her money regularly every month. To supplement his income he had to also do some coaching in his spare time. Here he studied the life of the people very closely and studied the philosophy of Arya Samaj which had largely influenced the people there at that time. He was probably writing his first novel at this time as is evident in his letter written on 29 January 1921 to Imtiaz Ali Taj. The novel written in Urdu is entitled *Ham Khwma-wa-Ham Sawab*. It was however published much later in 1906. According to the noted Hindi critic Dr. Indranath Madan, Premchand had written his Urdu novel, *Asrare Muavid* earlier in 1898.

In Pratapgarh Premchand felt he could improve his prospects in the

education department if he also qualified as a trained teacher. Accordingly, he took a two years leave from his school and joined the teacher's training college in Allahabad. This was in July, 1902. A year before he had written, according to Dr. Indranath Madan, a novel in Urdu entitled *Pratap Chandra* which was perhaps never published in its original form.

In the training college, because of his studious nature and inquisitive mind he was a favourite student of the Principal. He passed out from the training college in first division in April 1904. Here again his main hurdle was mathematics. He could not fare well in this subject. His certificate was accordingly endorsed: "Not qualified to teach mathematics." During this time, according to his biographer Amritrai, he also passed the special vernacular examination in Urdu and Hindi. Also, it was during this time that he began correspondence with Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam who had just launched his famous Urdu journal "Zamana" and was then looking for some talented writers. Premchand's correspondence with Nigam lasted till his death. His letters to Nigam offer ample information about the chronology of his writings, his social and political views as well as various schemes which he undertook for journalistic and creative writings. These also offer an insight into the problems that Premchand faced monetary or otherwise on numerous occasions. The compilation of these letters published by Amritrai and Dr. Madan Gopal under the title *Chitthi-Patri* (letters) occupies a significant place in the canon of Premchand literature.

After the training Premchand joined back his school in Pratapgarh and taught there for about nine months. The Principal of the training college in Allahabad who had developed special liking for Premchand for his hard work and affable behaviour, got him appointed as headmaster of Model School attached to the training college in Allahabad. Premchand was hardly twenty-five at that time. It was as such a rare honour for him to be appointed as headmaster at that age. Obviously the appointment was on the merit of ability and not on experience. He spent a few months in this school. In May 1905 he was transferred to the district school, Kanpur. His salary was at this time rupees twenty-five a month.

In October 1903 when Premchand was in his training college in Allahabad, his Urdu novel *Asrar-e-Muavid* (Mystery of the Temple) began to appear in series in a weekly Urdu journal "Awaz-e-Khalk" published from Varanasi. The first instalment of the novel appeared on 8 October, 1903. The series was completed in February 1905. The author sought to expose in this novel the

vicious immoral life of seemingly virtuous priest in the society. He takes his readers to the underworld of the priesthood and quite effectively brings about an appraisal. The morbidity of priestly world which is so adoringly revered by the innocent masses deceived by the hypocritical solemnity. The socially respected priests like Yashodanand and Mahant can live luxuriously on the huge income from the offerings of innocent devotees and so do his cronies around him. The masochistic life of Mahant who corrupts a host of innocent women falling prey to his lusty designs in the temple, is vividly portrayed. In Ramkali's readiness to elope with Mahant deserting her handsome husband is shown how money and sex began to play their role of corruption among the comfortless dissatisfied lower middle class women. The novel is a caricature of the priests and priestly rituals. Mahant knows it too well that there is no other place where he would enjoy the luxuries of wealth and sex and stays on for newer preys at the temple. He does not succumb a dent do rob even the same Ramkali of her ornaments who has been loyal body and soul to him. The novel is verbose at many places and weak in structure. Part of the novel has been developed by dialogues and episodes from legends. It however demonstrates the author's power of characterization and his observation of women's weaknesses. It succeeds to strike a moral note while rendering a gay satire on the prevailing corruption of the priests exploiting the faith, devotion and innocence of the masses, specially the adolescent girls.

Premchand lived in Kanpur from May 1905 to June 1909. It was the formative phase of his writing. While in Kanpur his association deepened not only with "Zamana" and its editor Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam but also with many literary luminaries of the time; Nauwatrai Nazar, Durga Sahai Saroor, Pyarelal Shakir etc. He was to miss in later years the literary and socio-political discussions he held with these litterateurs in Kanpur. Some of these friends must have urged him for remarriage. As already seen Premchand did not enjoy any spiritual or intellectual company with his first wife who left him in a huff and never returned. Even so he sent regular monetary help to her for quite some time. He was an impressive youth of twenty-five now. He was fair and handsome and tall. His relatives too began to pressurise for remarriage.

In September 1935 Premchand wrote in a letter to Dr. Indranath Madan, "My first wife died in 1904. She was an unfortunate woman...After her death I married a child widow." Since his first wife lived till much after his second marriage, he seems to suggest that her imprudish disappearance from his life

was as good as her death as far as he was concerned. He did not seek either, before his second marriage, any formal legal divorce from his former wife; it was neither the custom in those days. Robert O. Swan who has done a commendable research on Premchand's life has written in his book *Munshi Premchand of Lamahi Village* "...nor did he tell his second wife about the first. She found out about it inadvertently eight or nine years later and when she taxed him with the deceit, he replied, "when a person believes some to be alive, that person is alive, when he thinks some one dead, that person is dead."

It was in Basti in 1914, some eight years after Premchand's second marriage that Shivrani Devi discovered that Premchand's former wife was alive. She had been told that the first wife was dead. We do not know if lack of good look was also part of the cause for Premchand's dislike of his former wife. Incidentally there is a passage in his novel *Kayakalpa* which sheds some light on it. "Whatever virtues a woman may have but if her face does not impress her husband she falls from his grace; and the married life turns out an unhappy affair... If the man does not like the wife he can go for more marriages. If the wife doesn't like husband she will spend the life weeping," says Yashodanandan (P., 11).

Premchand however did not search for any beautiful girl for his second marriage. All the time he was primarily concerned about the pitiable lot of widows in Hindu society. He decided as such to marry a widow to set an ideal before others. He came across during these days a matrimonial advertisement for remarriage of a child widow. She was the younger daughter of Munshi Devi Prasad who belonged to Salempur in district Fatehpur in the then United Provinces. Munshi Devi Prasad had three children; two daughters and a son. The idea of remarriage of his daughter did not occur to him suddenly. He had been equally championing the widow marriage which had full sancity of the vedas and Hindu religious scriptures. There were many protests in Premchand's relations who also feared social boycott but he would not budge from his decision. Nevertheless, he would have got prettier girls elsewhere so also enough dowry, but that was not his desire. The marriage was solemnised in the Shivratri day of 1906. There were not many in the marriage party. His step brother Mahtab and his friend Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam were among the few who attended the marriage. It was a simple marriage.

In his second wife, Shivrani Devi, Premchand found full spiritual and

intellectual affinity. She had considerable literary talents to write, though she concealed it for quite some time. She published her first story “Sahas” (courage) in 1931 which Premchand came to know only after its publication. Her book on her husband *Premchand Ghar Mein* (Premchand At Home) is a valuable contribution to Premchand literature and is an indispensable book for scholars and researchers. She was a constant source of strength and inspiration to her husband and as will be seen later she took great interest in socio-economic upliftment of women. As a congress worker she took active part in the national movement and went to jail twice. No tribute can be ample about her sacrifice and dedication which contributed anonymously to the success and glory of her husband.

The first marriage of Shivrani Devi had been at the age of eleven and within three-four months her first husband had died. How and when she was married and subsequently widowed she had no recollection.

In the meanwhile Premchand had made his own place as a writer and was contributing regularly for “Zamana”. He also wrote the column “Raftare Zamana” which was a popular piece at the time. Apart from his interest in socio-economic upliftment of the masses he was also taking a keen interest in the political development in the country. He studied seriously the various movements that were being pioneered by Gandhi, Tilak and Gokhale. He was initially influenced by Gokhale and wrote an article on him which was published in the November—December issue of “Zamana” in 1905. He had been also moved by the political thinking of Tilak at the time and found in Gandhiji a combination of the two great leaders Tilak and Gokhale. As is evident from his writings in “Zamana” like the life sketch on Joseph Garibaldi and the story “Iske Dunia Aur Hubbe Vatan” he was closely studying the lives of patriots abroad and their sacrifices to free their countries from foreign domination.

Sometime in early 1907 Premchand wrote his first story “Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan” (The Most Precious possession in the World) which was published during the same year in “Zamana”.

During his stay in Kanpur Premchand published his second novel *Ham Khurma Wa Ham Sawab* (The Best of the two worlds) in 1906. The book priced at ten annas was published by Indian Press, Allahabad. It was advertised in the September 1906 issue of “Zamana”. It bore the sub-title of “Do Sakhion Ka Vivah” and carried the author’s name as Babu Nawabrai, Premchand’s pen name at the time. The title intimates the readers that the

book is “interesting, educative and new novel.” The Hindi version of this novel under the title *Prema* appeared next year (1907) also from the Indian Press, Allahabad. It was written around 1904 when the author was at the training college in Allahabad.

Premchand dealt with the issue of widow marriage in *Prema*; a recurrent theme in several of his novels later. The hero, Amritrai, a handsome lawyer from a prosperous family establishes a social reform society for radical change in the society. Reflecting over the worldly pleasures and the nationalism he argues to himself “Everybody wants to achieve his selfish ends. You think of others’ ends. There is no better way to live this ephemeral life than this...” For his radical views he is taken for a Christian convert. And accordingly he is refused the hand of his beautiful fiancée Premma whom he has loved for four long years. Social service for the author at this time was synonymous with patriotism and he felt the latter wasn’t possible without the attainment of the former. Premchand presents in ruthless details the deplorable condition of widows at the time who were deprived of the tiniest comfort in life, not even the coloured sari by the ‘saviours’ of tradition. The wretched condition of the widows is described through Ramkali who is reduced to worse than a domestic servant after the death of her husband. Such a victim of retrograde social conventions is Poorna who becomes widow on her second marriage anniversary when she is about twenty. She is doomed to live within her four walls settled over mourning all through her life. To redeem her from that grief and rehabilitate her in the world of married people is an open revolt against society. It is Amritrai who shows that spirit of revolt and marries Poorna against deadly hostilities of orthodox leaders of society. Within a fortnight Premma, who died for his love, is married with Dannath, the capricious friend of Amritrai. The widow, Ramkali marries Prannath, a social reformer and follower of Amritrai. But the path of revolt is not as easy as that; one has to weather through bravely myriad problems and sufferances as the author demonstrates in placing his hero among them for marrying Poorna. And Amritrai, the lawyer not only loses the servants but also the clients in social boycott. The entire town turns against him even the grocers refuse to sell goods to him. Things, however, improve and the sympathisers arrive on the scene provided one undergoes the ordeal of sufferances patiently as the hero, Amritrai does. The novel would have ended here but the author has plan to show something more beyond this. He as such conveniently extends the canvas yet further and takes some liberty to bring about his resolution. He has

already resolved to end his story with the marriage of Prema with Amritrai and accordingly now eliminate the characters from scene who have performed their role. Prema's dejected husband, Dannath and his associates attempt to make a fatal attack on Amritrai. Poorna who shoots Dannath to death kills herself too. the hero then marries Prema. The story thus depicts remarriage of two widows. This has been devised by the author with a seriousness of purpose to focus the society's eyes twice over the issue. The events as they converge, of course, suggest some measure of arbitrary handling of the situations. The novel in its construction and theme strikes the reader in various ways. It provides an absorbing story, an important trait to draw the readers who were then fond of pure entertainment. Premchand was the first author who so powerfully and effectively advocated the remarriage of the widows and sought to mould the views of his readers about its traditional disapproval. The novel has a much larger canvas than its predecessor. The women characters of the novel also foreshadow the unique individuality and urge to protest that were to emerge in *Sewa Sadan* later.

Premchand's next novel *Kishna* which is untraceable today was probably published in 1907 by Medical Hall Press, Varanasi. It was reviewed in October-November issue of "Zamana" in 1907. The same year "Zamana" serialised his next Urdu novel *Roothi Rani* (The Angry Queen). It appeared between April and August 1907. This is the only historical novel by the author. He had no attachment for the past though, as will be seen later, he wrote some of the finest short stories against historical backdrop.

Roothi Rani depicts the story of Umadey, the daughter of Rawal Lonkaran of Jaisalmer who ruled the state in 1586. Lonkaran accepts the proposal from the king of Marwad, Rao Maldev to marry his daughter. Rao Maldev was a powerful king in Rajasthan. Rawal Lonkaran who burnt in uncompromising envy, could not raise his head against Rao Maldev. He thought it would be an opportune time to kill the king in the trap of marriage. He as such conspires to kill the king at the marriage rostrum of his daughter. Umadey who learns about this conspiracy informs Maldev through her maid servant, Bharili. After the marriage the king who gets awfully drunk mistakes Bharili for the queen and spends the night with her. Bharili too begins to love the king. The angered queen then decides to keep off from the king and does so until his death. After his death, however, she dies a 'sati' (death by self immolation) with his turban. The novel brings out quite sumptuously the feudal social set-up of Rajasthan. The author attacks the mutual rivalries of the kings : "The

rift and the differences in the Hindus were responsible for the ruin of the country and the constant defeats by the foreigners.” There is an obvious message for the author’s countrymen for mutual unity. He even hints at inter-religious unity and tolerance and creates a character in Khavas Khan who is above religious fanaticism. He rules with charity and respect for the people. Both Hindus and Muslims pay homage after his death. The heroine of the novel, Umadey has the stout boldness to challenge her husband for dishonouring her on the very first night of her wedding. She refuses to submit to him so long as he lives. Revealing the false values of Rajput social order the novel highlights the absurd unhappiness of the Rajput kings over the daughter's birth, intrigues and conspiracies even to ruin the daughter's life just to satisfy the personal grudges.

Roothi Rani is one of the earliest novels of the author and, therefore, displays slackness in structure. Premchand’s chief concern here is to tell his story for which he concentrates over the visuals of events. It, however, convinces the reader about the author’s deep insight into history and his full awareness of the local colour. Premchand would have written excellent historical novels, had he chosen to do so.

III

Soz-e-Watan : **“Death of Nawabrai”**

Towards the end of 1908 Premchand published his first short story collection *Soz-e-Watan*. It was published by Zamana Press, Kanpur though the name of the publisher was omitted in the book. This omission proved a boon as will be seen later. The book sold at five annas a copy. The volume contained his first short story “Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan” (The Most Precious Possession in the World). The story is full of patriotic fervour. The most precious possession for the heroine is not any wealth or jewellery but that drop of blood which is shed for the sake of the motherland. In the very story we find Premchand’s concern for freedom of the country which forms one of the prime themes in his future works. The other stories which had been published earlier by “Zamana” include, “Shiekh Makhmoor”, “Yahi Mera Watan Hai” (This is My Country) and “Sansarik Prem Aur Desh Prem” (Love for the Land and the Family). Like the first, the second story too is replete with patriotic inspiration and calls for the need of communal integration about which the author laid great emphasis in his works during later years. “Yahi Mera Watan Hai” draws on somewhat extended canvas. It portrays a character who forsakes his wealth and family in America to return to his country and dedicates his life to the service of the motherland. The author’s objective is to propagate the extraordinary sacrifice of his hero and, therefore, he has painted the idealised picture of unusual renunciation. In the story “Sansarik Prem Aur Desh Prem” the author attempts to show the superiority of country’s love to that of the family. The plot centres on Josef Mezzine’s nationalism, his sacrifice and struggle for the freedom of his country. The local colour of story is accordingly based in Italy with ample glimpses of England and Switzerland. Here again the author’s chief concern is to provoke his readers to think about their own role in the country’s freedom. These stories clearly indicate Premchand’s direction of thinking at the time when Swarajya Movement had come to the fore with emerging

political awakening among the educated youths of the country.

In June 1909, after the publication of *Soz-e-Watan*, Premchand was promoted as sub-deputy inspector of schools and posted to Mahoba in Hamirpur district located in the Bundelkhand region of the then United Provinces. His salary was now raised from rupees thirty to fifty.

During this time there was a proposal to bring out an Urdu journal by Indian Press, Allahabad. Premchand was requested to edit the journal. He went to Allahabad and did some preliminary work for the magazine. He suggested the title of the paper as “Firdaus.” He however withdrew himself, on persuasion of his friends and went to Mahoba to take up the new assignment. Perhaps the time was not yet ripe for him to resign his job and take up journalism as a full time occupation. The journal titled as “Adib” was brought out by Pyarelal Shakir for some years.

Premchand enjoyed a spiritual affinity with village life. He once wrote to Upendranath Ashk, “If man can afford he should settle somewhere in a village...” His transfer to Mahoba as such quite approximated with the taste and temperament of his spirit. Mahoba is renowned for the legendary fighters, Alha and Uddal and has been a battle arena of many Rajput kings. His writings of this period are substantially influenced by the local legends and environs. In this land of Bundelas (Mahoba) Premchand lived from 1909 to 1914. As a sub-deputy inspector of schools he had to tour most of the time to interior villages to inspect schools. His journey was mainly on bullock carts or the horses. His post carried good social status and professional respect since fates of teachers were in his hands, his recommendation and report would matter a great deal for their promotion. In the entire province there were, at the time only 81 sub-deputy inspectors of schools.

Hardly had he spent four months in Mahoba when the wrath of the government fell upon him. The joy of the publication of his first volume of short stories ended perilously. While he was on an inspection tour he was summoned by the district collector to report to him at once. He took a bullock cart and covering some thirty-forty miles in the night appeared before the collector. A copy of his story collection, *Soz-e-Watan* lay before the collector. He enquired from Premchand if the book was written by him. Premchand accepted his authorship. He was asked to explain one by one the themes of the stories. The collector suddenly burst out that the stories were full of sedition. “Thank your stars that you live under British empire. Your hands would have been chopped if it were Moghul rule”, the collector said.

Premchand was asked to surrender all the copies of the book. So far three hundred copies of the total one thousand published had been sold. The copies available with him were placed before the district collector who got them burnt. Premchand was a witness to the scene. The remaining copies which were with Nigam, however, escaped.

It was the first time in the country that the government had challenged a Hindi author's book and burnt it for fear of revolt. It may be recalled that on account of Suppression of Press as many as 350 printing presses, 300 newspapers and more than 500 editions of the books had been seized by the government between 1910 and 1919. Premchand's volume was one of the forerunners of these victimised lots. The matter however did not rest at that. He was asked to submit for government clearance whatever he wrote before publication : "Whatever I write, on any subject—may be even on elephant tusk—I must submit to the district collector. It is not once or twice a year that I write. It is my daily work. If every month a manuscript is sent to him he is sure to feel that I am slack in my official duty. Therefore, "Nawabrai" is now dead for some time..." Thus Premchand wrote to Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam on 13 May 1910. He now looked for a new name to be able to continue writing. It was over six years' labour that he had earned some fame as "Nawabrai". He had to sink it forever to emerge as new author with toil of several years again. Nigam suggested the pseudonym of "Premchand" which was readily accepted by him and hereafter (October-November 1910) the world knew him as Premchand. His first work to be published under this name was "Bade Ghar Ki Beti" (The Daughter of Noble Family). It was published in December 1910 in "Zamana".

Just as he had to be careful about the secret of his identity he had to be equally cautious about the themes and plots of the stories in matter of obvious suggestion. The author who lived in the present and loved to use primarily contemporary setting for his stories had now to delve into the past. His nationalistic yearning would glare too manifestly if he chose to draw situation and characters from the living happenings around him. He turned, therefore, his attention to history and folk tales. The legends and mythologies that abound Mahoba about the heroic battles impressed the author. He also made use of his study of the history of Rajasthan. Politically he was now under the influence of Tilak and Gokhale. He favoured extremists rather than the moderates. Constant tours involved him meeting people and customs of diverse nature and also a good measure of experience of jungle life. All these

find considerable reflection in the stories of period which include; “Alha”, “Rani Sarandha”, “Vikramaditya Ka Tega” (The Sword of Vikramaditya), “Raja Hardaul”, “Maryada Ki Vedi” (Alter of the Honour), “Shikari Rajkumar” (Hunter Prince), “Mamta” (Attachment), “Milap” (Union), “Pap Ka Agnikund” (Fire-pool of Sins), “Amawas Ki Raat” etc, Premchand wrote now regularly for “Zamana”. His column “Raftar-e-Zamana” (March of the time) drew large readership. In the meanwhile “Adib” had begun to appear from Allahbad edited by Pyrelal Shakir. Premchand also sent his stories for publication in “Adib”.

In 1912 Premchand published his Urdu novel *Jalwa-e-Isar* (Glory of Sacrifice) which he had commenced while at Kanpur and completed probably at Mahoba. The book was published by Indian Press, Allahabad. Hindi version of the novel appeared some nine years later in 1921. The story of the novel which has a confused texture deals with the love affair of Pratap and Virjan. The author was yet building up his style and craft. The novel as such presents the author in the making and presages the subject matter that he was to use in later years extensively; the exploitation of farmers by zamindars, money-lenders, casteism and the rampant play of police atrocities.

Kamala, Premchand’s eldest child was born at Mahoba. Another daughter who too was born here, however, did not survive.

He was at this time planning to bring out his next short story collection; *Prem Pachisi* and discussed it in his correspondence with Nigam in February-March 1913. He was also contemplating to switch over gradually from Urdu to Hindi. He expressed his desire to do some writing in Hindi in a letter he wrote to Nigam in February, 1913 : “Take me as your ebitor of the Hindi department. I shall be translating interesting articles from newspapers and magazines.” He seems to be now economically hard up for he makes an interesting plea to the editor of “Zamana” in his letter of 7 June 1913 in connection with his remuneration for writing in his journal : “I shall be much grateful if you could send me without much difficulty a three to four rupee-watch and a pair of shoes worth four or four and a half. My shoes have been taken by Chotak and I am without them.”

Constant touring and stay of indifferent places impaired his health and he began to develop at this time frequent complaints of indigestion. It was also affecting his writing seriously. He, therefore, sought his transfer to some better place. He had also in the meanwhile contracted severe amoebic dysentery from which he could never recover fully despite all treatment. Last

one year of his stay in Mahoba is said to have been very painful. Finally his request for transfer was acceded by the authorities. However contrary to his expectations of a better place he was transferred to Basti, another backward region in the province. It proved no better than what he had experienced in Mahoba.

Premchand lived for about two and a half year in Basti from 1914 to 1918. Here again he could not be relieved from his touring duty. He was in no mood to go to Basti and was toying with an idea to launch a journal. Earlier in 1913 when Nigam started his weekly paper "Azad", Premchand had decided to join him. But partly for economic insecurity in the new-born paper and partly for his constant illness he had abandoned the idea, however, once again he felt journalism could provide him better opportunities for his literary writing. He even thought to take over "Zamana" and wrote about it to Nigam to know if it was a viable proposition. He wished to take a year's leave without pay and try his hand in the paper. At the back of all this planning was his serious urge to devote full time to literary writing with some economic security for the livelihood. During his illness in Mahoba he had indicated about his plan in a letter to Nigam: "...Here I have rendered some fifteen years service. If I live for sometime I may be eligible for invalid pension..." (22 May 1914). Before joining his Basti assignment he took some six months leave for treatment. This, however, did not bring any significant improvement in his health.

During the phase of his writing in Mahoba and Basti Premchand was consciously eager to develop his own style in writing. He had read a good deal of European as well as Bengali writers. He had himself written for about fifteen years by now in addition to doing some translations of other stories. It was now an effort of an original writer to assume his individual style. He wrote to Nigam on 4 March 1914 : "I am still undecided what style to adopt. Sometimes I follow Bankim and sometimes Azad. Recently I have read Count Tolstoy and since then I am in his influence. This is my weakness, what else..." All great authors have struggled to achieve their style and it was not before long that they achieved their individual identity. Premchand was no exception in that. He developed it to his own unique stamp but this excellence was the fruit of years of toil.

Also at this time he was seriously contemplating to write in original Hindi. It was perpetuated not only for his economic needs and larger scope of publication but also for his ardour to reach the masses who did not have

access to Urdu. He informed about his endeavour to write in Hindi to Nigam from Basti on 1 September 1915 : “I am now practising to write in Hindi. It is not possible to live on Urdu writing. It seems I will have to spend life in Hindi writing like Balmukund Gupt. Which Hindu writer has achieved the success in Urdu that I shall attain ?” For various reasons he was thoroughly disappointed with Urdu journals and publishers.

He published his short story collection *Prem Pachisi* in 1915. This was applauded by the renowned Urdu poet, Mohammed Iqbal. The anthology contained most of the stories Premchand had written in Mahoba. His manuscript of part two of *Prem Pachisi* was also ready at this time. He wrote some of the finest stories here which include; “Iswarya Nyay” (Divine Justice), “Kaptan Sahib” (The Captain), “Do Bhai” (Two Brothers), “Dhokha” (Deception), “Panch Prmeswar” (The Divine Panch), (published in “Saraswati” in June 1916), “Fatah” (Victory), “Ealidan” (Sacrifice), “Sjjanta Ka Dand” (The Curse of Goodness) etc.

All this while Premchand must have felt the need of attaining some academic credentials. Perhaps this was his professional requirement working as he was in an educational establishment. He found some time to devote for academic studies though it was telling on his health. He was already straining with the service and the massive writings going alongside. “I want to appear for F. A. (Faculty of Arts) examination”, he wrote on 26 July 1915 to Nigam from Basti. “There is no go without this in this department.” Incidentally now mathematics was made optional and his major obstacle in the way was removed. In 1910 he passed Intermediate examination in second division with English, Philosophy, Persian and modern history as his subjects. His deep study of Persian some twenty-five years ago under Maulvi Sahib proved abundantly useful for the examination as it did again for B.A. in later years when he sought to acquire the university degree.

Premchand was transferred to Gorakhpur in August, 1916. He reached the new place on August 18. Here he taught at Normal School. He was also the superintendent of the boarding house for which he was paid an extra monthly allowance of fifteen rupees. His stay at Gorakhpur augured well in his literary career. It was a period full and interesting for him and similar to that of Kanpur his acquaintance widened with the scholars and writers of the time. It also shaped his thinking towards a new direction. Among his new friends here who were to acquire eminence in their respective fields in later years were; Raghupati Sahai Fireq, the famous Urdu poet and later winner of

Gyanpith Award, Mahavir Prasad Poddar who played a prominent role to influence Premchand to write in Hindi and Imtiaz Ali (Taj of Lahore). Premchand wrote regularly for Taj's journal "Kahkashan" (The Milky Way). Taj Published some of his works including *Prem Pachisi* (Part-II), *Bazar-e-Husn*, *Prem Battisi* (Part-II) and *Goshai-e-Afiyat*. It was here that Premchand was moved by Gandhian philosophy which changed the course of his life altogether. It was again, here that he built his unshakeable faith in non-violence movement and later even renounced his twenty-year long government job as teacher without a dent a reflection over the benefits of pension, so coveted by a middle class government employee.

In some measure Premchand had already approached Gandhian thought during his translation of Tolstoy's stories. Tolstoy's credence in Love, mercy and renunciation of surplus wealth was known to him. Premchand had published his translation of Tolstoy's stories under the title of *Prem Prabhakar* which contained some twentythree stories. These include: "That Whereby Men Live", "Where Love is there God is Also", "Children May be Wiser Than Their Elders", "How much Land Does A Man Require?", "The Godfather" etc.

Premchand's first son Dhunnu (Shripatrai) was born the very night his family had landed in Gorakhpur. The same month he was given an increment of ten rupees. He was later sent to Allahabad for training in first aid after which he received another increment of ten rupees. His salary was thus seventy rupees a month during this time. His step mother however continued her bitterness towards his wife, Shivrani Devi. Enduring calmly this acrid behaviour Shivrani Devi kept her home still off from any disquieted atmosphere.

In 1917 he published his first collection of Hindi short stories *Sapta Saroj*. Nine years ago he had published his Urdu collection. The present volume contained seven stories: "Bade Ghar Ki Beti", "Saut", "Sajjanta Ka Dand", "Panch Parmeswar", "Namak Ka Daroga", "Updesh" and "Pariksha". The stories are edifying in character. Embodying basic goodness of human nature these demonstrate the author's concern to lift society to an ideal state of justice and goodness. In "Bade Ghar Ki Beti" (Daughter of the Noble Family) the author raises the issue of disintegration of joint family system and seeks to propound through the character of Anandi how disintegration which is the essential curse of new civilization can be prevented. The story ends in the harmonious patch-up of the two brothers, Shrikanth and Lalbihari in whom

differences had emerged due to strained domestic matters. Anandi is the wife of Lalbihari's elder brother, Shrikanth. Lalbihari who is indolent by nature ill treats his sister-in-law in the absence of the elder brother. He comes to senses when Shrikanth insists on separation in which case no one but Lalbihari himself has to suffer. Anandi, however, forgives the brother-in-law and saves the family from breaking away. Premchand believed in the essential goodness of joint family system in which all members of the family would work and live harmoniously to the common good of the family. But then there is no justification for indolence and the modern readers would have grounds to differ with the author. Redeeming theme, however, is the nobility of Anandi on which the story has been titled. "Sajjanta Ka Dand" (Curse of the Goodness) is an ironic attack on the malaise of society in which honesty and good nature of man may be rewarded by the threat of his very existence. The reward of district engineer Sardar Shiv Shingh's honesty is his transfer and harassment. The author seems to question the society if its survival and progress is possible by eliminating the virtuous props who are the real strength of society. While in "Sajjanta Ka Dand" Premchand sets the ideal of honesty, in "Panch Parmeswar" he portrays the ideal of truth and justice. The punch is not only a community magistrate for justice with legal authority but he also represents divine power to dispense justice unbiased. The story dramatizes its verity. Jumman Sheikh is a close friend of Algu Chaudhry. He is least disturbed when his aunt Khala whose maintenance was his moral and legal responsibility, threatens to go to the Panchayat for his refusal. He is confident that his friend Algu will set aside the complaint of Khala and give verdict in his favour. His illusion is, however, shattered when Algu decides the case in favour of Khala on the merit of truth and impartiality. He also has his occasion to take revenge when in next Panchayat he is asked to decide the case of Algu Chaudhry. Algu Chaudhry has sold his Ox to Shah, The latter has paid only part of the settled amount and refuses to pay the rest because in the meanwhile the Ox has died. Algu Chaudhry approaches the Panchayat for justice. On the seat of Punch Jumman Sheikh realises the moral, legal and divine responsibility to do justice. He does what is just and gives his verdict in favour of Algu Choudhry. He says, "Today I have come to believe that it is Khuda that speaks from the mouth of Punch." The author has exquisitely brought about the mental conflicts of the two characters in the story. It is considered as one the outstanding psycho-analytical stories of Premchand. In the story "Namak Ka Daroga" (The Salt Inspector) the author depicts the

devotion to duty. Munshi Vanshidhar refuses to accept the bribe of forty thousand rupees from Pandit Alopudin knowing well that he will have to pay a heavy price for his honesty. He is suspended within a week. But Alopudin realises his moral defeat in the hands of honest Vanshidhar. It purges his soul. He offers him a job with higher salary and more facilities as his manager. The author has tried to suggest how the spirit and nature of dishonest people may be moulded by the sacrifice of honest persons in the society so that sacrifice is not idealized at the expense of suffering for virtues and accordingly he demonstrated the immediate retribution by way of reward.

Premchand paid equal attention to his subject matter and characterization. He was influenced by western story writers and assimilated the best traits in technique and style. His plots are intense and are capable to hold the reader till the end. Of course there are occasions when he has indulged in undue description without being conscious that these might distract the readers. He wrote both narrative and psycho-analytical stories. He was neither a moralist or realist in any way. In one of his essays he made it clear that true motive of a writer should be to create beauty with the blend of both (real and the ideal). "Story should throw light on some aspect of life. It should examine the conventions of society with enthusiasm and criticism and should awaken the natural impulse of man for the truth (satyam), the good (shivam) and the beautiful (sundaram).

IV

Sewa Sadan A New Phase in Hindi Novel

With Premchand's next novel *Sewa Sadan*, begins a new era in Hindi literary history in the growth and development of Hindi novel. Premchand had commenced this work while at Basti and completed it at Gorakhpur. It was written in 1916-1917. Originally written in Urdu as *Bazar-e-Husn* (Beauty for Sale) it is perhaps the extension of the same story about which he had written to Nigam from Gorakhpur on 24 January 1917, "The story I have been writing recently has assumed a novel form. I have reached some hundred pages...I am so absorbed in this novel that I do not wish to do anything else."

Premchand had to wait for quite some time for the Urdu version of the novel although the Hindi publisher made pressing request for the Hindi manuscript. The Hindi version was completed within one year and was published by the middle of 1919, much before its Urdu original. Ganga Pustak Agency who published the book paid him Rs. 500. This was the first big amount he had received during the eighteen years of his literary career. His first Hindi novel *Prema* had not fetched him any monetary gain.

Hindi readers were during this time under the spell of novels written by Devakinandan Khatri, Kishori Lal Goswami, Srinivas Das, Balkrishna Bhatt and Gopalram Gahmari. There were also the translations of Urdu novels which had gained popular readership. But these novels were either coarse entertainers or moralising sermons with ornamental language. There was no picture of real life nor any attention to the technique and craft of the novel. Premchand introduced for the first time in his novel, the language and life of the real people. He lent a unity and finished form to the plot and structure and treated his moral theme with realistic detail and without sacrificing the interest of the readers for entertainment. Nevertheless the novel took Hindi readers by surprise. The critics hailed it as a new landmark in Hindi fiction. Padamsingh Sharma and Ramdas Goud who reviewed it in Hindi weekly

“Swadesh” (8 September 1919) described it as a historical achievement. Soon it was translated into Gujarati, The author received one hundred rupees for Gujarati edition. Urdu edition was published after about a year by Imtiaz Ali Taj.

Sewa Sadan is the story of tragic consequences of dowry system and the problem of prostitution for which author attempts to suggest some solution.

Police inspector Krishnachandra has two daughters Suman and Shanta. During his twentyfive years of service in the police department he has lived a chaste and honest life and is respected for this honesty. Within his salary he has maintained the family well and satisfied the needs of the daughters in all respect so that he has no money to give in dowry on his elder daughter's marriage. His illusion that the educated parents and the boys would not demand any dowry is shattered when he discovers that dowry is the precondition for marriage of his daughter. He decides to secure some bribe and makes deal with Mahantji for three thousand rupees to hush up a case of murder in which Mahantji was held responsible. Being raw in such affair he fails to shut the mouths of his subordinates and the news of his acceptance of bribery soon leaks out. The case is investigated secretly and he is arrested at the melodramatic moment of his preparing for the engagement ceremony. He accepts the guilt and insists punishment for the crime. Though he advises his wife not to spend any portion of the bribe amount on any matter other than on Suman's marriage, the wife, Gangajali spends it on the lawyers to release her husband from the prison. Eventually neither Suman is married nor Krishnachandra is freed. The dowry seeking parents of the boy at once break off the engagement. Gangajali moves to her brother's (Umanath's) house where her daughter, Suman, 'beautiful, frisk and proud' is finally married to a widower, Gajadhar much older than her age. Gajadhar is a clerk drawing fifteen rupees a month. To supplement his income he works hard on part time to earn five rupees extra so as to satisfy the needs of his beautiful wife. He even hands over his salary to Suman to manage the house in her own way. Suman who was brought up without any economic strain by her parents spends all money much before the month end. This extravagance dismays the husband who is at his wit's end to manage the remainder days of the month. A family feud ensues between husband and wife. Suman's visit to the nearby prostitute's house and also to Subhadra, the wife of the lawyer, Padam Singh in the locality adds fuel to the flame. On account of his own weakness of poverty and over age *vis-a-vis* captivating charm of his wife he begins to

suspect her fidelity in such visits.

Suman oftenly reflects over Bholi, the prostitute who leads a dignified and affluent life; town's all socially respected men visit her and she holds each one of them to ransom by her charm. Suman however spurns at Bholi's low profession. After a series of quarrels one night Suman is thrown out of her house by the husband. She seeks shelter of the lawyer, the Professed social worker. The lawyer who fears social scandal has no courage (unlike Surdas of *Ranga Bhoomi*) to provide a permanent shelter to the helpless girl. Suman finally lands up in the very house of Bholi whom she had all along despised despite her affable kindness. It doesn't take long for Bholi to change the course of Suman's life.

Her personal charm and good voice both help Suman to be a successful courtesan. She takes to dancing and music. Here she gets what she never achieved in her husband's house; there is money flowing and there are people to care about her. Men vie each other to please her with costlier gifts. She has her comforts, she has her luxuries and yet because she hates the profession in the core of her heart she yields to the persuasion of Padam Singh and Bithaldas who have been in the meanwhile making their efforts to reform the courtesans life and lend her a respectful place in the society. Gajadhar has also been repentent over his harshness to the wife. Suman fulfills all that is expected of her by the social reformers. But the society turns against her in all hostility. The settled marriage of her sister, Shanta is called off by the parents of bridegroom just at the moment of marriage only because she happens to be Suman's sister. Sadan who was earlier dying for the love of Suman proves a dogmatic weakling in the hands of his parents. The helpless father Krishnachandra after witnessing his younger daughter's plight commits suicide. Even when Suman finally succeeds to get her sister married to Sadan she is dejected to see younger sister's coldness toward her. Suman craves for love, sympathy and charity in the society but is mauled desperately wherever she sets her eye. At this hour of utter despair appears before her a Sadhu who has dedicated his life for "Sewa Sadan" (A Home for Social Service). He ushers in some ray of hope for her and pleads that it is in the service of mankind that man can today attain salvation. "In satyuga man's salvation lay in knowledge, in *treta* it was in truth, in *dwaper* it was in devotion; and in *kaliyuga* there is only one way and that is in service." This sadhu is none but Suman's husband, Gajadhar.

The novel thus depicts the story of Suman's struggle to live a dignified and

honourable life. But this urge is preceded by her indiscriminate lust for luxuries. She is a combination of the heroine (Nirmala) of *Nirmala* and Jalpa of *Ghaban*. Premchand's sense of realism at this very early stage is very conspicuous. To place his heroine in misery he does not outrightly depict the male counterpart responsible for the misery. Gajadhar is no less concerned for the happiness of his wife and, accordingly, the early phase of Gajadhar's character has been drawn with an apt natural brush. His suspicions join with Suman's own wayward behaviour leading to unhappy consequences for both. Suman's discard of spirit in favour of matter places her in a series of sufferances through which she purges and attains the spiritual elevation wherein she learns to think not of herself but of others. The author has also attempted to convey his message that sooner or later the society must find some solution to the evil institution of prostitution if it aspires to stand on a healthy foundation. One may agree or disagree with the solution of setting up 'Sewa Sadans' for rehabilitating prostitutes and their off springs but the causes that contribute to this malaise or the consequences that stem from it cannot be disputed. And it is in the treatment of these two factors that the merit of the book needs to be seen.

Premchand was the magician of characters. He created a large variety of simple and complex characters in his fictions which were round or flat or blend of both. But this perfection would be too much to expect at this early phase of *Sewa Sadan* and there are characters in it unusually disappointing. On the whole, however, all other characters like, Suman, Shanta, Sadan, Umanath, Padam Singh, Subhadra and even Bholi are drawn full of life and are impressive. Premchand was still wrestling to free himself from the hackneyed technique and style of his predecessors. There are descriptive passages which do not help in building the desired atmosphere. So there are long dialogues and moral reflections enjoining author's own explanatory comments which obstruct the reader's enjoyment of the novel as a piece of objective work. But the author is sensitive to make his characters rational and natural and in that he breaks a new ground in the craft of characterization. This is evident in the psycho-analysis of Suman's mental conflicts and Sadan's inner struggle to take the erstwhile despicable step in social orthodoxy. Tho Hindi readers also found shockingly newness in the telescopic observation of brothel life in Dalmandi of Varanasi, the crookedness of municipal politics, hypocrisy, selfishness and cowardice of social upper castes as also the emerging reformers that Premchand delineated

in incisive detail. He was associated with Arya Samaj in Basti and the novel presents the Arya Samaj influence in the reformatory comments of the author. In other novels too where widow remarriages constitute the themes, the Arya Samaj influence seems to have a bearing. But Premchand was ever against orthodox rituals. Later on he critically disagreed with Arya Samaj policy of proselytization among Muslims.

Premchand received much impetus with the success of *Sewa Sadan*. He launched work on his next novel with vigour and strength; his eyes were more sharp, his observation keen and the craftsman in him zealous to sharpen the skill. His essays and stories written during this time show his critical thinking about the society, politics and literature. But his growing concern was the age-long suppressed common man and the woman in society whom he wanted to see smiling. In one of his essays; "Daure Kadim Daure Jadid" he scathingly condemned the economic order of new society which he said, "will feed itself to surfeit even if others starve to death, it will rejoice with greater delight on the face of others' tears of blood. If it decides to wear red clothes, it will not hesitate to kill others to dye its clothes in others' blood." In the same vein he condemns the neo-capitalists and the altruistic advocates of industrialization who scantily cared for the interest of poor masses. The dream of Russian revolution had come true and the newspapers at the time were warmly full of Russian news. Premchand himself was deeply influenced by Russian literature. Tolstoy's exposure of poor peasants' exploitation and their retaliation was vivid in his memory. The massacre of 13 April, 1919 in Jaliawalan Bagh too had animated a new energy and fervour among the educated youth. All these echo in Premchand's next work *Premashram* and its sequels. Also it was the ripe time that the exploitation and suppression of farmers who constitute the very foundation of the agrarian set up of Indian society should have been highlighted. Premchand turned his eye towards this which no Hindi author had cared to do earlier. He was at this time in full influence of Russian revolution. In his letter to Nigam written in 1919 he indicated about this, "I am now in full agreement with Bolshevik ideals."

In 1919 Premchand passed his B.A. examination from Allahabad University in second division. His subjects were English, Persian and History. This was the dead end of his academic qualifications. He was thirty-nine years old now. He must have realized that neither the master graduation nor his much cherished law degree would be of any use in the path he had chosen. And although he made a bit of preparation for M.A. in English

literature, he abandoned the idea of further academic qualifications. He was rather looking for some alternative job where he could devote more time for literary writing. With his graduate qualification he hoped to get an offer for a “headmaster in some aided school and earn hundred and twenty five rupees.” He also wished on occasions to join some newspapers. He once advised Nigam to set a company like Leader and launch a daily so that those willing to take up journalism like him might join him. There was no development anywhere in this direction and he had to continue on his present job still over a year.

Premchand had started writing Urdu version of his next great novel *Premashram* in May 1918. He now chiefly concentrated on it and completed the work in February 1920. In between he had to detract from the novel to prepare for B.A. examination. The Urdu version was entitled *Gosh-e-Afiyat* (Peaceful Retreats). The Hindi version of the novel which was published in early 1921 appeared before Urdu. According to Dayanarayan Nigam, Premchand was paid Rs. 3000 by the publishers, Ganga Pustak Agency for the novel. Premchand wrote scarcely any story during his work on later part of the novel. Only two stories figure during this period : “Daftary” and “Pashu Se Manushya” (From Animal to Man).

Premashram (The Blessed Abode) is the first Hindi novel on the life of farmers. In this novel the author turns from the urban life of *Sewa Sadan* to the oppressed people of the agrarian world. In a dissecting examination of feudal and pre-capitalist society he offers his penetrating observation of the changing nature of exploitation of farmers. Premchand lived in a village and knew their sorrows and pangs as co-villagers. It is this first-hand experience that adds force and vivacity to *Premashram*. Written after the First World War the novel is a powerful spokesman of the farmers’ struggle against the tyranny of zamindars during 1920s. Premchand did not rejoice the British victory in the War and refused to join in the jubilee celebrations in which his school in Gorakhpur had participated. The authorities had objected to his absence and he reacted sharply to this objection. For him there was no cause of joy and jubilation when the masses in the country— the poor farmers— were being made the grist of zamindars and government officials’ luxury. The victory had no meaning for them and so could hardly impress the author. No novel had been attempted in Hindi before on life and sufferances of farmers ; a novel on the problems of such ‘low’ segment of society was inconceivable. Premchand demonstrated a defiant courage and originality by

picking up this subject for his prose epic which critics hailed, and quite aptly so, as the greatest work of the twenties.

Premashram is the story of clashes between two classes ; the zamindars supported by their selfish sycophants and heartless government officials ; and the poor farmers who are just emerging to build courage to protest against the tyranny and exploitation. The story opens in village Lakhanpur, some twelve miles from Varanasi. At a time when the farmers are seized with their problems the zamindar's messenger, Girdhar arrives on the scene and announces the death anniversary of the present zamindar's (Gyanshankar's) father—Jatashankar. He compels the farmers to sell their ghee for the anniversary at a throw-away price. No one except Manohar has courage to refuse. This blunt refusal of the farmer terrifies other farmers. They know too well the cruel vengeance of Gyanshankar who even abhors his mild uncle Prabhashankar for being moderate. The villagers advise Manohar to beg forgiveness of the zamindar. Finally when the farmer does so the zamindar falls fierce upon him.

If Manohar's refusal typifies protest against the feudal tyranny his son revolts against the oppression of State. The latter refuses to work without wage (begar) for the deputy collector on tour to his village. Forced free labour at the time was taken for granted by the zamindars and the government officials as their right and no villager dared refused. The refusal was met with repression, harshness and penalty. Therefore even when Jwala Singh, the deputy collector hatches no grudge against Balraj, the youthful son of Manohar, he cannot restrain the rancour of his corrupt officials against Balraj and the villagers. A crushing blow is dealt on the villagers when on the face of crop failure they are imposed a penalty of hundred rupees each. The story develops through numerous other events following Gyanshankar's brother, Premshankar returns from America after his education in agriculture. Gyanshankar is repulsive to his brother not merely because the latter is disposed charitably towards farmers and loves to serve them but because he is equally a legal heir to his father's property. Gyanshankar considers him a threat to his sole ownership of the state. Here joins in the story Gayatri the widow sister-in-law of Gyanshankar who offers him to manage her estate in Gorakhpur. Gyanshankar now prices not only at her body but also at her wealth.

The miseries of the villagers take yet another turn. Gyanshankar's agent (Karinda) Gaush Khan who plays havoc on the villagers, dishonours

Manohar's wife, Bilasi. This sets Balraj and Manohar to fiery temper. Balraj kills Gaush Khan and disappears. The whole village is put to trouble by the demonic zamindar and a criminal case is filed against the entire village. The band of corrupt officials now gangs up to fleece the already humiliated villagers. The lawyer, Irfan Ali who pleads the case of the peasants deserts their side soon as he finds the other side more profitable. The doctor, Priyanath who is the medical specialist in the case also leans towards Gyanshankar's side since he sees no scope to get money from poor peasants. To save the villagers from humiliation Manohar admits his crime in the court but it does not save the farmers from being served with long sentences. Repentant that he is responsible for the sufferance of his fellow peasants, Manohar commits suicide in the prison.

Gyanshankar who is more than a moral debauch spins his intrigues to satisfy his sexual hunger on his widow sister-in-law Gayatri and to take possession of her estate. He succeeds to deceive the woman by his postures of a devout religious believer, special reformer, writer and a spirited speaker. He secures her surrender of the body as well as the wealth. According to his dictates, Gayatri makes the will of her estate to his son, Maya Shankar. She however soon discovers her folly to be caught in the wicked trap of Gyanshankar. She sets out on a pilgrimage where she slips from a hill on way to Chitrakut and vanishes for ever.

Premchand dreamt of a happy village life where the oppressive zamindars would give up their rule of injustice and violence and live with love and common well being of the farmers. He, therefore, hastens to paint a happy picture of his Lakhanpur village. Premshankar set up "Premashram" and devotes to social service. In Premshankar's championing of co-operative farming and his socialistic dedication to bring mutual harmony and betterment among farmers Premchand has tried to exemplify the 'Premashram' of his dream—the blessed abode where the landlords and the peasants both would live with mutual prosperity. Mayashankar who inherits the estate resolves to provide peace and charity to the oppressed villagers. The treacherous Gyanshankar who had recklessly fought his way to enable his son Mayashankar inherit Gayatri's wealth fears his doom's day is near since Mayashankar shows no interest to preserve the wealth and multiply it in the manner his father did. Despaired of his failure he commits suicide. Jwala Singh, the deputy collector, gives up his coveted government post which, he feels, is a hindrance to his humanitarian work. Irfan Ali, the lawyer gives up

his practice promoted by the same ideal and Priyanath, the doctor devotes his life to the service of the people.

Premchand's prime concern was social reform. But he never shunned from the reality to propagate his ideal. The elimination of feudal system was still a far cry in twenties. It was a burning question at the time as to what could viably bring in the right solution to end oppression of the poor masses. There were people both for and against the weapon of 'satyagraha' in achieving this end. Premchand, the realist depicted objectively this fear of the people "That satyagraha has power to eliminate injustice has now proved an illusive ideology." "It was not, however, defeatist's voice. Premchand was quite aware of the immense powers of the masses and in his ironical comment in the end he seems to exhort and question the society at once." Who will fight the injustice ?"

Premchand was a painter of real India. His farmers are as such not ideal figures. He portrayed them with weakness and strengths as inborn in human beings and as natural in uneducated masses. They fight, fear and proceed to struggle for self-preservation. They win and lose. In all their actions they contain more grains of humanity than their rich counter part; the feudal land lords and ruling officials because they live in their natural habitat with simple needs and simple urges to fulfill. They have the essential piety of their culture.

In *Premasharam* the author takes the reader for the first time into the heart of Indian villages and lets the reader survey with his own eyes the wound and injury of the helpless farmers. It is a picture of total life of the Indian villages, and anticipates the grandeur of such depiction in *Rangabhoomi* and *Godan*. The author has sought to connect very powerfully the issue of farmers with the political movement of the time. In this the author displays his great potential to see into future. The novel was completed on 25 February, 1920 and on 10 March that year Gandhiji announced his historic weapon—Non-Cooperation Movement. "Under such situation", Gandhiji declared, "we have only one way-non-cooperation." One only wishes that the novel had been published before the movement.

Premchand achieved remarkable success in characterisation in the novel. There are greater number of characters in it than *Sewa Sadan* and most of them, Gyanshankar, Premshankar, Gayatri and Kamlanand (Gyanshankar's father-in-law) have been developed superbly well. Premshankar is an ideal creation of the author and is a memorable character of the novel. He is the

spokesman of Premchand's thoughts about reform and humanitarian work. There are other characters whom the author has not been able to handle with significant success. Also there is convenient disposal of characters in the end. *Premasharam* has a wider canvas than *Sewa Sadan*. No other novel before Premchand had been written on such a wide canvas of village life. The very subject matter was a revolutionary attempt at that time. In choosing this challenging subject and accomplishing with masterly treatment Premchand opened a new dimension in Hindi novel. The second challenge that the author met triumphantly is the plot construction of the novel in weaving together consistently the story of Gyanshankar and Premshankar.

Whether the novel stirred a mass agitation against the oppression in the rural population is a subject of further research. But we have enough evidence to see that there was perceptible effect on the agrarian people at the time. In 1921 the arrest of three peasant leaders had galvanised a wide demonstration by the farmers in Rai Bareilly. As many as seventy thousand peasants of the then United Provinces had shaken off their complacency and joined the nationwide Non-cooperation Movement. Premchand who could not actively participate in the Movement had nevertheless inspired the masses in his writings to rise against the alien rule of oppression and the Indian agents of exploitation.

In June 1920, Premchand's second son, Mannu fell seriously ill. He ailed for about a month and died of small pox the next month on July 6. He was just 11 months old then. Premchand perhaps felt guilty for not providing adequate medical care to the child. He wrote about it to Sayyad Imtiaz Ali Taj on July 28. "The youngest child (son) died of small pox on July 6 and left a blot on me for ever." By October this year his short story collection *Prem Battisi* was published and proposal was afoot for the second edition of *Prem Pachisi*. But things were shaping all along to different overtures and Premchand had to prepare himself for a newer direction in his career.

Resignation: Setting up of the Printing Press

Premchand had constantly felt his government job as an arch-hindrance for free expression. All the while he had been contemplating to change over to a job that could provide him larger scope to write freely. He was drawing by now towards the Swarajya Movement and was coming to the closer influence of Mahatma Gandhi. His writings at the time and before, already displayed Gandhian philosophy in some measure or the other. He must have been also feeling a sense of guilt for not having resigned his job like the multitudes of highly placed people had done in the country, no matter what his family encombrance was. He was now convinced the time had come for him to take up the gauntlet. The country was yet boiling in the horrid tragedy of Jaliawallan Bagh massacre. Premchand's hatred for the British rulers had been all this while greatly whetted; he could not compromise with the officials for all gains on earth. And when he was offered the honorary title of Rai Bahadur by the Governor of the then United Provinces, Sir Malcolm Haily he at once declined.

His decision to give up the government job was quickened when Gandhiji visited Gorakhpur in 1921. Nearly two lakh people from the city and nearby villages turned up to listen to the leader of the nation. Premchand was so charmingly moved by the speech and personality of Gandhiji that within a couple of days he tendered his resignation from the job had he held for twenty years. He was relieved of his post on 16 February 1921. He was drawing a salary of Rs 175 a month which was then a substantial amount. For a person having a large responsibility behind it was no uncommon reuncaition. According to Shivrani Devi Premchand could not sleep for two nights while making his decision to resign. He joined subsequently the Non-cooperation Movement and tried to make living by setting up a charkha shop in partnership with Mahavir Prasad Poddar. It did not succeed and in about a month he had to close it down to find some other means for livelihood.

During this time a deputy superintendent of police, Mohammed Ikram is said to have visited his house on suspicion if there was some underground activity going on within the garb of charkha occupation. He had been puzzled to see the lights on in Premchand's house till late night. He was however deeply moved to see the dedicated author working on his book at the dead hour of the night. The police officer was immediately charged with love and respect on Premchand's simplicity, sincerity and dedication for the country that he too tendered his resignation from the job.

Some nine years ago the Urdu version of his novel *Vardan* (Blessing) had appeared under the title of *Jalwa-e-Isar*. The Hindi version of *Jalwa-e-Isar* was published during early 1921 by Grantha Bhandar, Bombay.

The story of *Vardan* concerns unmatching marriage on account of economic compulsion and uneven social status. It is an evocative portrayal of conflict between love and duty. Pratapchandra is the son of a poor woman whose husband has suddenly disappeared and left her to her own fate. Her sole property is a house part of which she had rented to Sanjivanlal, the father of a charming girl, Vrajrani. Pratapchandra and Vrajrani who love each other from their childhood are separated when the girl's mother finds a prosperous bridegroom for the daughter. The girl is married to Kamalacharan, an aimless brazen youth. He is the son of a senior government officer. He loses his heart on his gardner's daughter and sinks in remorse and shame when caught red-handed by the gardner, He flees home to save his face. He boards a train where again he fears to be caught being without ticket. He is pitted in a haunting fear psychosis and jumps from the running train in such bewilderment and dies. Pratapchandra after his despairing end of love for Vrajrani turns a sadhu. He devotes his life to humanitarian work while Vrajrani takes to writing poetry and is quite successful.

Pratapchandra is known by his sacred name of adoption, Swami Balaji. After the mishaps in her house when Vrajrani is alone, Pratapchandra has a strong urge to visit her. But since he is now a sadhu he must suppress his desire and as such abandons the idea to meet her. Later he goes to Himalayan foothills where he happens to meet his father who is now an accomplished yogi. With his spiritual attainments Pratapchandra dedicates himself to his mission of social work. Vrajrani in the meanwhile becomes a famous poetess. Her friend, Madhavi is enamoured of Pratapchandra and decides to declare her love. But eventually Madhavi turns a sanyasini and follows Pratapchandra on his travels.

The story makes a handsome adolescent reading. And though there are unusual reformatory attempts in the novel and characters are arbitrarily introduced and removed from the scene, it offers brilliant interpretation of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts which the young author had studied arduously some ten years ago.

Premchand was back to the town of his childhood after twenty years of stay outside. He reached Varanasi from Gorakhpur on 19 March, 1921. He had authored about half a dozen novels till then. He decided to take up freelance writing, with some journals and devote rest of the time for creative work. He wrote for the leading Hindi daily "Aaj" (Today). He wrote a booklet on the gains of self-rule entitled *Swarjya Ke Fayade* meaning advantages of self rule in which one finds very original and rational idea of the author on the subject. But on the whole there was not very encouraging response from the newspapers and journals. He also contemplated for some time to get up a printing press. A year ago he had planned enthusiastically to launch a press in Calcutta in partnership with Mahavir Prasad Poddar and again to run the light press in Kanpur in partnership with Nigam. But subsequently both the proposals had to be dropped. There was the immediate problem of maintaining the family. The Marwadi High School in Kanpur happily offered him teachership in the school which Premchand willingly accepted. He reached Kanpur on 23 June, 1921 and took up the new assignment. It was here in Kanpur where his youngest son Amritrai was born in August. He was called affectionately Bannu at home. Here Premchand wrote the thought provoking article "The Obstacles of the Present Movement" in which he critically examined the hindrances of the Non-cooperative Movement. It was published in "Zamana" in October-November, 1921. He was already famous, many new writers longed to see him ; just to meet the writer or to get his guidance and Premchand willingly obliged them in spite of his tight busy schedule. Among his new friends here were the two prominent figures in national politics and literature at the time Ganeshshankar Vidyarthi and Balchandra Sharma 'Navin'.

Premchand could not pull on well with the manager of the Marwadi High School though he was an endearing colleague of the teaching staff there. Eventually after a brief spell of teaching at the school he resigned the job on 22 February, 1922 and left for Varanasi. He went to his village and constructed his house. He resolved to settle on writing free from the town strifes and its politics. He was writing at this time the famous story of Surdas,

Rangabhoomi (The Battlefield) which he commenced on 1 October, 1922. Soon he was requested by the Gyan Mandal to edit their journal, "Maryada" (The Glory). Dr Sampooranand who was editing the journal had gone to jail on his participation in the Non-cooperation Movement and Gyan Mandal required a worthy editor. Premchand brought about some changes and made many improvements in the journal which were well received. After Dr Sampooranand was freed from jail, Premchand handed over the journal and taught for some time in Kashi Vidyapeeth for about a year on a salary of Rs. 125.

By far Premchand did not get an encouraging treatment monetarily by his publishers. For all his massive and successful writing he could not earn enough remuneration so as to make his living solely on writing. Not only the manuscripts were held up for unduly longer time it was also difficult to find a publisher for his books. Far more difficult it was for him to get his due royalty. Of course some publishers and editor publishers were also not in very sound position to pay the author what he actually deserved. But by and large his was not a happy experience with the publishers. With all his bitter experiences in government service, teaching establishments and the publishers' apathy he now resolved to set up his own press. He had somehow saved Rs. 4000 during his service in Gorakhpur. With this money in hand he borrowed money from other sources and finally established his press in April 1923. Raghupati Sahai "Firaq" also invested in the Press. It was named on the suggestion of Nigam as Saraswati Press. His step-brother Mahatabrai who had acquired wide experience in printing Hindi Book Agency in Calcutta joined him to manage the press. According to Nigam opening of the press was a great mistake of Premchand. "I had asked him not to plunge in the problems of Press," wrote Nigam, "My advice was that after leaving the service he should concentrate with patience and integrity on writing but he was looking forward to have a settled income by selling up the firm. He plunged into press without foreknowledge, as he realised later ; and suffered heavy losses."

Premchand had in fact miscalculated his business abilities. He could not run the press to any economic advantage though before its opening he seemed to be very confident as is evident in his letters to Nigam. The press was a total flop. He not only sank his hard-earned money in it, his valuable time was consumed in the trivial work of proof reading, matter setting, in the worry of types and cases and the machine. It seriously affected his literary

writing. Later he confessed that it was perhaps his greatest blunder in life. Any how to extricate himself from the debts and to earn his livelihood he opted for a job in Lucknow with the Ganga Pustakmala as literary adviser on a monthly salary of Rs. 100. He joined the publishing firm in September 1924. In June that year his three-month old daughter died.

By now his short story collection *Prem Battisi* had been published. Plays like *Karbala* and *Sangram* had also been completed. *Karbala* is based on the theme of Hazrat Hussain's martyrdom in the field of Karbala. Premchand was an inveterate student of the history and in this play he showed his pleasingly surprising research on the battle of Karbala. Hindus had also sacrificed their lives along with Hazrat Hussain in the battle of Karbala. How could Hindus be presented their at that point of time ? Premchand argued that scholars have opined that after the Mahabharat battle Aswathama's grand children had migrated over there. There are evidences to show, he argued, that those Hindus were the children of the Hindu slaves whom Alexander had taken as captives with him. Premchand tried to depict in this play that Hindus could not be separated from their Muslim brothers, since the former had fought with them in their religious battle. It is pertinent to note that unity among Hindus and Muslims at the time the play was being written was of vital importance for the freedom of the country. Premchand sought to consciously relate the story of Karbala martyrdom to the national battle for freedom in which both Hindus and Muslims had to play their role shoulder to shoulder. In his major stories that appeared in next two years ; "Pariksha" (The Test), "Rajyabhakt" (The Patriot), "Kshma" (Forgiveness) and "Shatranj Ke Khilari" (The Chess Players), Premchand depicted the same Hindu -Muslim unity with his devout purpose of showing that the integration of these two major races in the country was not only possible but was of crucial importance in the freedom struggle. *Karbala* is thus an eloquent spokesman of communal harmony. It was written speedily during the period Premchand was writing *Rangabhoomi*. According to his own view the story of the play is at once "interesting and pathetic".

The enthusiasm of Premchand in writing *Karbala* was, however, immensely sapped when no one came forward to publish it. He sent it to Nigam who had to deliberate over pros and cons for long before serialising in "Zamana" in 1926-27. Premchand however began to publish its Hindi version in his own press but then the press had already come to a stand still. He then handed it over to Dulare Lal Bhargava who finally brought it out in

November, 1924.

Sangram is based on the theme of national movement. He had begun it some time during early 1922 in Kanpur and completed it at Lamahi. It was published in February 1923. Premchand dramatised how the exploitation of zamindars, bribery, forced labour, and biased institution of justice had been all conspiring together to play havoc on the life of poor farmers. The play seeks to awaken the farmers of their rights and prepares them to take up the field to fight repression and foreign tyranny. In some measure it augurs the story of *Rangabhoomi* and sums up the author's earlier themes.

VI

Rangabhoomi to Kayakalp

Premchand worked with Ganga Pustak Agency in Lucknow from September 1924 to September 1925. He had already completed his great novel *Rangabhoomi* in August that year while at Lamahi. The novel was originally written in Urdu under the title of *Chaugan-e-Hasti* which had been completed earlier by April that year. He had worked on the two versions of the novel simultaneously. Like his earlier novels *Sewa Sadan* and *Premashram*, this novel too, was first published in Hindi.

His stay in Lucknow proved prodigiously fruitful howsoever a brief sojourn it was this time. He was now writing his next novel *Kayakalp* in original Hindi on which he had started working while at Lamahi in early 1924. Meanwhile, his Hindi version of *Karbala* which was under print till then came out in November, 1924. Within two months *Rangabhoomi* appeared in January, 1925. *Rangabhoomi* was written on as broad a canvas as *Premashram*. It added to the fame Premchand had earned after the publication of his earlier novel. He is said to have received Rs. 1800 for this novel from Ganga Pustak Agency who published the master work. This was four times the royalty he had received for his first novel *Sewa Sadan*. The novel was well received. The eminent scholar Professor Amarnath Jha described it as “a glorious book in modern Hindi.” Manifestly Premchand was more successful in fame and money in Hindi publications than in Urdu. He was now pre-eminently a Hindi writer, as great as he was in Urdu.

That Premchand’s fame as a great Hindi writer had travelled wide is seen in an offer he received in 1924 which if he had accepted would have relieved him of all financial crisis that he had plunged in. He did not accept it. In 1924 the king of Alwar offered him a monthly salary of Rs. 400 with ‘car and bungalow’ with all facilities to continue his literary writing as he desired. It was a big temptation at that time as it is for any writer in India even today. It would have relieved at one stroke, all his financial problems for which he had to waste his precious time in his printing press or working with publishing houses. The offer was not from a foreigner but an Indian king, a well wisher

who loved his works. Premchand debated over it and though he had already refused he also loved to see the mind of his wife. "I think it would be a good idea to accept the job," he told his wife Shivrani Devi who promptly corrected him, "Don't be silly. You have decided to tread over a difficult path. There are no motor cars or bungalows on that road." It must have been an exciting moment of joy for an author to hear such words from his wife who was no less concerned about his career as a writer than he himself was no matter what prices she would have to pay for the difficult choice. He paid warm tribute later to Shivrani Devi for her noble sacrifice. The hero of his story "Prerna" (Inspiration) which he was yet to write, admits, "All that I owe, I owe to my wife. I shall never forget her sacrifice. I can only praise her patience."

Rangabhoomi is the testament of Indian people's struggle against the socio-economic and political oppression of the poor peasants by Indian rulers and the ruthless British administration. It narrates not merely the story of the farmers of Pandeypur but also the farmers of the entire country symbolically written on a huge canvas like that of *War and Peace*. It describes how the feudalists, capitalists and the government officials conspire together to reduce the poor farmers to ashes. Very powerfully the author shows the battle is not lost without fight; it is resisted and resisted till the last fighter falls. The picture of the battle whether by the people of Pandeypur or Udaipur State as it emerges in the novel is the documented scenario of a brave country where even the blind beggar rises to the occasion and leads the masses against injustice and coercion.

The story of *Rangabhoomi* is primarily the story of Surdas on one hand and Vinay and Sophia on the other. Both stories are tautly woven towards one end. While Vinay discards his feudal zamindari splendour for rigours of peoples' service, Sophia forsakes her affluence of capitalist family to work for the people. But whereas Vinay's parents are proud of Vinay's mission and even encourage him for his work, Sophia's parents least approve of her choice.

Surdas is the blind beggar of Pandeypur village. He owns a patch of fallow land in the village where the villagers graze their cattle. John Sewak, the industrialist decides to set up a cigarette factory over his land. He takes for granted that the blind beggar would easily part with his land because he has no strength to oppose it for his poverty and physical handicap. Contrary to his expectation Surdas opposes and does so with firm conviction. This sets the

story into motion. The fight begins between two classes, the oppressed and the oppressor. Both the sides now arrive at the “Rangabhoomi” (the play ground) to test their power. Surdas’s plea is that the land is his ancestral heritage which has been used by far by the villagers for grazing their cattle. He would not deprive them of this facility, his only gift to the village from whom he derives his own sustenance. In his own way he has an ideological difference in matter of setting up of the factory. He fears that once the factory is erected it would corrupt the whole atmosphere of the chaste village. The workers who would arrive from different places shall have no respect for the village women. The farmers of the village too would give up farming to become workers in the factory. There would be inhygeinic slums and village children would grow in that squalid habitat. The people would take to drinking and contact all sorts of vices that are born in such atmosphere. Factory to him is the symbol of all corruption and ills which he would not allow to happen on his land.

Bluntly refused by the beggar, John Sewak now turns to Raja Mahendra Kumar of Chatari who is the President of Banaras (now Varanasi) municipal board. Raja Mahendra Kumar’s relatives have been once helped in a fire by John Sewak’s daughter, Sophia and, therefore, Raja feels indebted to John Sewak. John Sewak seeks to exploit the friendship which under obligation Mahendra Kumar can not refuse. His wife Indu is a close friend of Sophia. He accordingly promises to get him the land though he himself does not approve robbing the poor beggar of his land. His father-in-law Kunwar Bharat Singh too does not appreciate the idea and points out that tobacco cultivation shall affect the food grain production severely. John Sewak’s own daughter Sophia who learns about this unlawful grabbing of the land from the helpless beggar goes all out against her father to help Surdas. The greatest obstacle for John Sewak is that the people of Pandeypur, inspite of all temptations of their prosperous life, support Surdas.

Raja Mahendra Kumar has great respect for women. John Sewak gets an opportune moment to exploit his virtue. He concocts an episode and tells the Raja that the people of Pandeypur have attacked his godown and have tried to assault the women. He makes the Raja believe that Surdas is the king-pin in this happening. This infuriates the Raja who bursts out “I thought he is a simple, poor man. But he appears to be crooked. I just took pity on his miserable state and had decided to search some other land for you. But if these people are bent upon mischief and determined to drive you away by

force they must be punished.”

Sophia who befriends William Clark, the district collector of Varanasi tries with his help to frustrate the wicked effort of her father. And although Clark has already issued his orders giving the beggar's land to John Sewak, she succeeds in getting the orders withdrawn. But this complicates the situation all the more; Mahendra Kumar makes it a prestige issue and moves even the governor to get the land transferred to John Sewak. In the meanwhile John Sewak succeeds to lure the villagers in his favour. The combined strategy of Raja Mahendra Kumar and John Sewak succeeds and Clark is transferred to Udaipur. Sophia who has been earlier living in Kunwar Bharat Singh's house is charmed immensely by the ideals of Vinay and falls in love with him. He is the only son of Kunwar Bharat Singh. Vinay's mother Janhvi who wished to see her son a dedicated social worker can not tolerate that he should slip from his mission on account of his love for Sophia. Also her orthodox heart cannot approve of his marriage with Sophia. To remove him from the association of Sophia she despatches Vinay to Udaipur where he works for the upliftment of the Aravalli people. Supporting the people and all those forces that rise against the foreign rule Vinay comes into conflict with the government. One day he is arrested and thrown in the jail on false charges.

Sophia knew it well that it is only through winning Clark that she can help Vinay. She, accordingly, accompanies Clark to Udaipur and with his influence visits Vinay twice in the jail. The people, however, mistake her to be Clark's wife. Vinay is rescued from the jail not by the effort of Sophia but by Naikram who was sent by Kunwar Bharat Singh to help his son. But then the people protest against government atrocities. They go amok when a man is crushed to death under Clark's car. They mob Clark's bungalow to demand apology. They even go against Vinay who at that moment is seen in Clark's bungalow. Sophia tries to pacify the people but cannot contain the fury of the mob. They refuse to leave the place. When Sophia is attacked, Vinay loses control and fires a shot. The guards too open fire. There is confusion all around and in the melee, she is carried away by Birpal Singh, a rebel nationalist to the forest. After some time Vinay too meets her. Sophia, learning that Vinay has changed side to the officials, scolds him severely. Vinay who had learnt about his mother's illness in the jail and for which he escaped prison now leaves for Varanasi. Both meet in the train again accidentally; they drop down at a lonely place where they live for about a year. Sophia who was drawn towards Vinay by his virtues does not wish to marry

him at least without the willingness of his mother, Janhvi. After a year both reach Varanasi where Kunwar Bharat Singh and Janhvi welcome them.

Back in Pandeypur village Surdas's prediction comes true. Surdas cannot help the factory being set up. True to his fears the atmosphere of the village is grossly vitiated. The spirit of brotherhood is lost. The teenagers, Gheesu and Vidyadhar even attempt to rape Subhagi in Surdas's house where the beggar has given shelter to the woman. Subhagi is almost their mother's age. The villagers try to hush up the scandal and go against the blind beggar when he reports the matter to police,

The axe then falls on villagers' houses. Their thatched houses are demolished to clear up space for workers' colony. The villagers accept the compensation but it is again Surdas who refuses to vacate his house. "I shall die where I was born," says he, "I won't give up my thatched hut so long as I live. We may have no strength for anything else but we are strong enough to die." Ironically the people of the village are divided. Some manage to get higher compensation while the less influential get the least or none at all. Naikram is paid rupees three thousand for compensation whereas Surdas is offered only one rupee. The entire village confronts John Sewak and Raja Mahendra Kumar when the houses are taken over by force. Even when warned of police firing the people refuse to budge. In the volley of firing Indradutta, the pioneer leader of the volunteer organisation falls which animates the people to fight the repression into death. Later even the sepoy's refuse to shoot. Now Surdas their hero who however tries to persuade the people to leave the place. But before he can complete his speech, William Clark who has been reposted as the district collector of Varanasi, fires a shot at Surdas. When Vinay appeals for restrain the people hoot and jeer him with sarcastic remarks that he is a traitor, oblivious of the fact that it is because of his sympathy with them that he has renounced the estate and is one with them. When still he cannot convince the people about his sincerity he kills himself with his pistol.

Surdas who is also fatally wounded is treated for some time in the hospital where he is visited before his death, even by those who had opposed him. Ultimately he dies a hero's death and makes the lasting comment about the fight, "What if we were defeated, we didn't turn our backs from the field We didn't bungle. We will again fight. Let us gather up our strength. With such defeats we will learn to fight you. We shall surely win one day."

The death of Surdas and his elevation in the eyes of people strikes a severe

blow to Raja Mahendra Kumar. His life-long dream to be peoples' idol is washed away. In his maddened fury he cannot bear any honour conferred on the blind beggar. He decides to strike down the statue of Surdas that the people have erected and for which his wife Indu herself has donated. He, however, himself falls under the stone statue while trying to fell it and dies. If Sophia had any meaning for her life after the death of Vinay that was ended with the death of Surdas with whom ended an age. She too makes the supreme sacrifice and gets drowned in the Ganga to end her life. If anyone is unaffected by the cataclysmic happenings of the village Pandeypur, it is John Sewak, who continues to be as busy with his cigarette factory as ever.

The novel as such is chiefly the story of Surdas. The sub-plot of Sophia and Vinay helps the development of the main plot and emerges as an integral part of the entire scheme.

Premchand has drawn a heterogeneous variety of characters in the novel who comprise kings, princes, industrialists, officials of local bodies and the government, farmers, petty shopkeepers, tradesmen and also the beggar. It is the full view of life. The blind beggar, Surdas's personality seems to be that of a true satyagrahi. He is the embodiment of Gandhian philosophy. He is not ignorant of the fact that it is not possible to win over the united forces of feudal and capitalist power that enjoyed the patronage of the government of the land. But he would not allow his fellowmen to watch the play of destruction of their culture and possession passively. William Clark, the representative of the empire, fears him because he rules the hearts of the people. It is by sheer force of his moral strength and character that he wins support of the host of villagers ; Dayagiri; Bajrangi; Bhairon, Subhagi, Thakurdeen and so on. And in the town he has his supporters in Sophia, Vinay, Indu and Janhvi whom he has won by his love and charity. He speaks in his colloquial Hindi. His words full of pun, wit and scriptural allusions flow from his heart and silence even the eloquent speakers. Quite forcefully he argues in his death that the fight was a game in which his side lost not because they were weak but because they were divided. "Our players are not united in the game. We fight with each other. No one sees beyond himself." In Surdas's dying words the author seems to exhort his countrymen about the supreme need of unity. There is emphatic utterance about it. Surdas stresses it, "If you have to rehabilitate your deserted houses, strengthen your unity." In several essays, stories and the play *Karbala*, it may be noted Premchand had repeatedly emphasised about the unity.

The most brilliant character in the novel next to Surdas, is the pretty idealist girl, Sophia. *Rangabhoomi* is perhaps the first Hindi novel which has portrayed a christian heroine and created her so powerful on an expansive scale. She is the herald of modernity and accepts nothing that fails the scrutiny of her reason. Quite agnostically she refutes all conventions and even refuses to attend the church. Her love for Vinay is full and stainless. She has to feign love with district collector, Clark for his sake. She loves Vinay for his ideals and virtues and cannot bear him slipping from the lofty mission she has admired in him. Her land is where she is born and where she lives and for the sake of her countrymen she joins the revolutionaries through she is later fed up with their promiscuous terrorist activities. Her life is meaningless without Vinay after whose death she too ends her life. The author has attempted to depict that the healthy elements of inter-religious unity are already there in newer generation of Indian people ; all that is needed is to respect it and integrate this unity.

In Vinay's observation of the pitiable state of kings of Rajasthan, Premchand has focussed his readers' attention to the decadent institution of kingship in the hands of foreign rulers. The author has no intention to create a model of idealism in Vinay and embodies him with full human traits; good or bad. In one of his essays, *Upannyas* (Novel), Premchand clarified his view of the ideal character. "For an ideal and noble character it is not necessary to make him entirely flawless— even the noblest have some weaknesses. There is no harm to underline the weaknesses of a character so as to portray him lively. Rather these very weaknesses help make the character human." It is on this tenet that Premchand makes Vinay side with the royalty in Rajasthan. He argues that the kings are the descendent of immortal Rana Sanga and Maharana Pratap who sacrificed their life defending the land and the Hindu race. The argument issues from his inherent attachment to the royalty; he is himself a prince and it would be unnatural for him not to have sympathy with his class. The author retributes him for this bias equally; even if he sacrifices his wealth protesting against his father, he falls from the grace of the people, they lose faith in him and decry his nationalism and in frustration he ends his life to prove his honesty. Vinay's is a paradoxical character. His weakness is not to harm any one. No one can doubt about his sincerity when he works devoutly for rural upliftment in Jaswant Nagar. He is also honest in his attempt at getting release of the fellow workers from the jail. He has no vested interest in his support for Pandeypur villagers. But then he is

impulsive and an amorous youth in inviolable love with Sophia. A bevy of his wayward actions is prompted by his love for Sophia and the people and yet the irony is that he; can convince neither.

Premchand was not unconscious of the fact that the gale of indiscriminate industrialism was in the offing which would hardly ever scruple over the good and bad of the society. He was also aware of its ultimate success in the transition of society from feudalism to new economic order because the feudal power itself shall support it for its vested interests. The atrocious acts of John Sewak who wants his daughter, Sophia to marry Clark so that he might realise his capitalist interests, vividly underline the character of this new emerging class. In queen Janhvi Premchand has created a rare specimen of an Indian woman who can see her only son Vinay dying rather than his sliding away from the path of people's service as a true nationalist. But here again the author does not fill her with replete ideal traits. She is still slave to conventions and extraordinarily conscious of her Rajput status.

Premchand's success as such is not merely the stupendous canvas on which he built his story with extraordinary success but also his lively panorama of characters whom he portrayed so skillfully. He may be accused of long dialogues and the dispensable extension of plot. It may be said he could have shown the death of Vinay and Surdas at once and saved the elaboration of some hundred pages by not prolonging the death of the latter. But a careful examination of the plot would reveal that the author's intention was to throw equal light on both the deaths. Juxtaposing them together would have seriously jeopardised the scheme of the plot.

One of the excellences of the book is the author's vigorous grasp of colloquial idiom. The rural characters of the novel speak their natural tongue with exuberant spontaneity. It adds a vibrant charm and sweep in the dialogues which prompt the reader to re-read them for their intrinsic sumptuousness of native nuance and colour. It would be wrong to suggest that Premchand failed to appreciate the inevitable need of industrialisation in modern world. His view of industrialisation was not to destroy the society and its happy life but to promote it. It is a cigarette factory that is being set up not a factory for healthy consumer goods for the prosperity of the society. There cannot be any justification for the corrupt ways by which the capitalists hand in glove with the feudal power seek to rob the possession of the poor masses with awe and coercion. Some critics have found influence of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in this novel which is a far fetched similarity on the

face of the fact that the worlds of the two novels and so also the themes are polaric apart. There are many similarities in Milton and Surdas (the Hindi poet) including their blindness but neither owed any influence to his counterpart. At this time one critic also came to suggest that Premchand's novel *Premashram* was influenced by Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. Interestingly during this period as Amritrai has pointed out, *Premashram* was being translated in Russian in the country of Tolstoy. This was perhaps the first novel of the author to be translated into a foreign language.

Rangabhoomi was an ambitious work of Premchand as ambitious as his earlier work on the farmers, *Premashram* and even more. It may be said to be the precursor of Hindi political novel. Premchand reached the apogian height of his fame with this masterpiece. It was declared the best novel of the year by the Hindustani Academy of the United Provinces who honoured the author with an award of Rs. 500.

Premchand was very active with his pen in Lucknow. He wrote some of the best stories during the period of one year which secured his permanent place in Hindi short story. He translated Anatole France's *Thais* and also the massive work of Ratannath Sarshar; *Fisan-e-Azad* into Hindi. The one-thousand page Hindi version of the latter work was entitled *Azad Katha*. Among the various stories that appeared during his Lucknow sojourn are; "Chori" (Theft), "Dhikkar" (Shame), "Narak Ka Marg" (The Road to Hell), "Mandir Aur Masjid", "Mata Ka Hirday" (Mother's Heart), "Mukti Dhan" (Wealth of Redemption), "Mukti Marg" (Approach to Salvation), "Shatranj Ke Khilari" (Chess Players), "Sabhyata Ka Rahasya" (Mystery of Civilization) and "Sawa Ser Gehun".

Premchand was an inveterate champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. He attacked the senseless fanaticism of either whenever it menaced this unity. It is seen in the story, *Mandir Aur Masjid* (Temple and the Mosque). The hero of the story is fashioned in Premchand's own elements. Chaudhry Itrat Ali who is a thorough bred Muslim and observes all rituals of his religion is far from being an orthodox. He values the Hindu rituals too. He bathes regularly in the Ganga and would drink no water other than Ganga water. He would even smear his house with cow dung. He holds the Hindu scriptures in good esteem as he does his holy Koran. His servant, Thakur is a Hindu. But the trouble shoots up when the two communities lose faith in each other. Muslims beat the Hindus and the Hindus who retaliate would not allow the Muslims hold the evening prayers peacefully. Both sides attack each other.

Both beat and are beaten and yet both claim the victory. Premchand thus attacks the irrational fanaticism of both the races whose redemption lies only in the emulation of Itrat Ali who demonstrates inter-religious respect while following his own religion devoutly.

Premchand wrote some nineteen stories based on historical backdrop. Among these *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (The Chess Players) is considered to be one of the best stories of the author. It is a satiric portraiture of the decadent feudal society in India. It delineates the intemperate entertainment, voluptuous living and utter disregard of what was going on around the country. It is the time of Wazid Ali Shah, the Nawab of Lucknow. The British army is approaching fast to conquer Lucknow. But Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Raushan Ali who have lived on rich zagirs in the service of the Nawab are least concerned about it. They are not concerned about their own homes. Their chief concern is to defeat each other over the game of chess. The British army lands up in Lucknow and the defenceless Nawab is taken prisoner. The zagirdars like Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Raushan Ali are supposed to provide their battalion to the ruling Nawab and defend him from the invaders. But they are too locked up in the game of chess to ponder over their responsibility. On the other hand, if they are devoid of their patriotism and loyalty to the State they have not lost their individual bravery. They are conscious of their individual honour and status. So when they pick up the quarrel they draw their swords to prove the individual valour. They fight each other and die while the Nawab is taken captive unchallenged.

The story thus presents a symbolic picture of the social, political and moral degeneration of the country. It is a true picture of the age of Wajid Ali Shah.

“*Sawa Ser Gehun*” is a village story and is one of the best among some thirtyfive stories that Premchand wrote. The hero of the story Shankar, a poor farmer borrows about a kilogram of wheat (sawa ser gehun) from a priest in the village so as to host dinner to his guest, a sadhu. He returns more than the quantity of grain to the priest during his harvest though without making special mention that his account has been cleared. The priest takes it to be merely his annual toll which he collects from all farmers. He adds up the interest every year to the principal sum and after seven years announces that the farmer owes him some hundred kilograms of wheat worth about one hundred and twenty rupees. He threatens him of severe consequences after death if he fails to repay the debt to the priest. The innocent orthodox farmer is terrified at the very thought to offend the priest for fear of curses and

decides to repay it at all costs. But the sum goes on multiplying. The poor farmer is exploited for twenty years and yet he remains a debtor to the priest even after death. The priest then catches the son to repay the debt of his father who has died after twenty years of slavery with the priest. The story thus presents the priestly coercion in the villages to which poor uneducated farmers have fallen prey for generations. A story of tragic exploitation it is an ironic attack on the religious bigotry and the social systems in rural India.

By now Premchand's next novel *Kayakalp* which he wrote between 1924-25 had been completed. The book was in press at the time of leaving his job with Ganga Pustak Mala, in Lucknow. He reached Varanasi on 1 September 1925. Four days later he informed about this to Nigam. He had hoped to find his press in better condition and had cherished to live on its earning to concentrate on creative writing without having to worry about his financial problems any more. But he was thoroughly disillusioned to find it in utter disarray. There was no choice but to sink or sail with the press in which he had invested all his life's earning. He now put in all his might to make it going.

Kayakalp was being published in the Saraswati Press. The book for which the author had contemplated various titles finally appeared under the famous title in 1926. The Urdu version of the novel, *Parda-e-Majaj* was published six years later in 1932 by Lajpat & Sons of Lahore. It was a fruitful period of the author's publications. In addition to his stories, some books were under publications in Varanasi and Calcutta. A collection of twenty-five short stories *Prem-Prasoon* was being published from Calcutta. His Hindi rendering of Anatole France's *Thais* too appeared from the Saraswati Press in 1926. The publication of both the works went alongside. *Thais* was published under the title *Ahankar* and was well received by the Hindi world. From Saraswati Press also, Premchand published his *Kalam, Tyag Aur Talwar* (The Pen, Sacrifice and the Sword) which contains biographical sketches of such historical figures who won immortality by pen, sword or sacrifice. The great figures include; Rana Pratap, Garibaldi, Akbar, Vivekanand, Gokhale etc. Meanwhile, from November 1925 his next novel *Nirmala* began to be serialised in the famous journal for women, *Chand*. It was published from Allahabad. The editor of *Chand* was a great admirer of Premchand's stories and had urged him to send all his stories of women's appeal to his journal. With the serial publication in this journal which had at that time a circulation of about 8000, *Nirmala* earned wide popularity among women readers. For

this instant popularity Chand Press itself brought out the novel later in 1927 in book form.

In *Kayakalp*, Premchand made a departure from his earlier works. It is primarily a two-fold story of mystic entertainment and social portraiture. The novel appears as an attack on those who took Premchand as mere reformist and thought he was incapable to write for entertainment. Premchand proved in this novel that if he cared to choose, he could transport the readers quite hypnotically in the world of phantasy. But this was not the chief objective of the novelist and, therefore, it is balanced with apt skill between mystery and the realistic social portraiture,

Chakradhar, a young handsome post-graduate resolves to dedicate himself to social work against the dreams of his father, Vajradhar, an astute retired tahsildar, drawing a pension of twenty five rupees. He has risen from an humble post and was promoted as tahsildar just three months before his retirement that too on an acting position. But he was so proud of this achievement that to please him the people called him “Tahsildar Sahib”. He wanted his son, Chakradhar, to make likewise a successful career and become a big official. But contrary to his father’s wishes Chakradhar would not do any regular job. “I want to be independent”, he tells his father. “Why did you do M.A. if this was your motto”, the father retorts. Chakradhar silences his father, “I did it to understand the significance of independence.” But then he is not altogether blind to his responsibility towards the family. He, therefore, takes a tuition to coach Manorama, the daughter of Thakur Harisewak Singh who is the Dewan of Jagdishpur state: The Dewan pays him a monthly fee of thirty rupees.

The social worker Yashodanandan, who is a lawyer by profession proposes his daughter Ahilya to Chakradhar. In fact, Ahilya was picked up in her infancy by Yashodanandan and was adopted by him. Yashodanandan makes no secret of this and discloses it to Chakradhar. Chakradhar visits Agra where he meets Ahilya and decides to marry her. Ahilya too is drawn to Chakradhar for his valour and spirit of sacrifice. He protests against the slaughter of a cow where it is forbidden. He braves the fierce violence and not only succeeds to stop the cow slaughter but also averts a communal riot. “By Khuda”, says Khwaja, “I am yet to see a brave lad like you. There are many to adore cow as mother but there are not many to die for her life. Why don’t you read Kalma.” Chakradhar replies “I worship Khuda. He is the Lord and Protector of the World...” He apprises his decision to his parents who in the

meanwhile have learnt about the story of Ahilya's adoption and dissuades the son to give up the resolve. But Chakradhar remains firm on his decision.

Vajradhar is shrewed enough to develop friendly relation with Dewan Harisewak Singh as his son Chakradhar is a respected tutor of the Dewan's daughter Manorama. Vajradhar exploits his friendship with the Dewan and through his influence gets into the closer ambit of the king of Jagdishpur, Vishal Singh. He succeeds to impress the present ruler of the state Rani Devapriya. She at once recognizes his cunning potentiality to raise her revenue collection and appoints him as her tahsildar on a monthly salary of twenty-five rupees.

Rani Devapriya is a widow. In her old age she has two passions ; sex and entertainment. She is religious and gives alms to the sadhus. She even performs *ygyas* sacrifices once or twice a year. All this she does not to go to heaven but to remain young for ever. She is ever crazy to have young handsome princes in her bed and there is no dearth of them. She loves to see the swoon over her charm as she dies for them. For her love sensuous passion are synonymous. Absorbed in her voluptuous pleasures she can never think of the misery and problem of her subjects; this challenge is left over on her manager who has instructions not to disturb her in these tiny matters. She has a mysterious medicine whose few drops rejuvenate her with all the lost over charm. One night she is visited by the prince of Harshpur, Indra Vikram Singh a handsome youth of thirty years. The prince announces that he knows her since long. "Surely I have seen you somewhere" she too acquiesces. The prince then convinces her that he is her husband of previous birth. The queen is thrilled at this 'discovery'.

The prince tells her that they lived as king and queen of Jagdishpur estate. After his death he took birth in the family of the ruler of Harshpur. He studied science and because there were no good science laboratories in India he went to Europe where he developed great interest in mystic studies. He met a Buddhist monk of Tibet in one of the laboratories of Berlin who at once deciphered his mystic interests and exhorted that knowledge of soul wasn't possible through the study of physics. On the monk's advice he went to Tibet to know truth through spiritual studies. There he met a Mahatma who claimed to be Darwin in his previous incarnation. He learnt from him same mystic exercises. He went from there to his estate of Harshpur. He visited, on occasions, Jagdishpur where every object seemed to him identifiable because, as he claims, he was himself the ruler of Jagdishpur. The queen is convinced

and is grateful to the prince for his concern for her even in his next incarnation. She at once decides to go with the husband. She hands over her estate to Vishal Singh and leaves with Indra Vikram Singh to his estate Harshpur. She could manage her estate from the husband's place too. She ponders over this possibility for some time. But then she must make total renunciation for the sake of husband and so finally parts the estate to Vishal Singh.

In Harshpur, Devapriya lives in a cave with Indra Vikram Singh as his wife. The author now refers Vikram as Mahendra. Through Yogic process learnt from the Mahatma he tries to restore the queen of her youth lost forty years ago. After three years of strenuous labour he succeeds to rejuvenate her. The queen though excited at the return of her charming youth is only worried that it would wither with the age. Mahendra practices yoga and spends greater time with scientific instruments in the cave. He has built a well-equipped laboratory in the cave. He is so absorbed in these activities that he has no time to look at the charm of the queen. The queen is depressed and feels that her old age was better than the rejuvenated youth if she has to suffer such neglect. Her body burns for sensuous gratification. "You have transformed my body. But why didn't you change my mind too?" she asks, soon replies the prince, "Until one has done penance for past deeds, the impulses of the mind cannot be changed." Devapriya considers that Mahendra hates her for her past voluptuous life and feels that he has done the rejuvenation (Kayakalp) of her body just to punish her. She cannot bear to suffer the loss of husband's love and accordingly decides to leave the place. Mahendra assures that he loves her deeply. "I do not know why the destiny stands as obstruction in our union." Devapriya then turns a tapaswini (monk) and lives with him with ardent devotion. After seven years of efforts Mahendra builds a plane in which he takes the queen for a joy ride. Mahendra falls mysteriously from the plane which plunges to the earth. He assures her, before his death that he would meet her again. The plane lands safely. Devapriya goes to Harshpur and takes over the estate of Mahendra.

Raja Vishal Singh who has taken over the Jagdishpur estate is penniless. He has lived very miserably so long as Devapriya has been the ruler of the estate. Now he is the lord of the vast land but without money. Over and above there is the mounting worry of his coronation which is to involve an expenditure of about five lakh rupees. A big feast has to be arranged, in addition to royal decorations, for the British officials and other rulers.

Temperamentally he is of benevolent nature and does not want to overtax the subjects. Even so he has no choice but to yield to Vajradhar and Dewan Harisewak Singh's suggestion to levy ten rupees per plough to collect five lakh rupees for his coronation ceremony,

Now the officials rampantly exploit the peasants and extract from them even upto forty rupees per plough. The peasants are also compelled for forced free labour (begar). Not even food is served to them while full care is taken to feed horses who are to participate in polo. The starving workers finally refuse to work until they are given food to eat. They appeal to the new ruler who too behaves harshly as he has been misled by Vajradhar and the Dewan that grains have been distributed among the workers. He loses his temper when Chakradhar pleads the cause of the starving workers. He hits Chakradhar with the butt of his gun. This enrages the five thousand workers who go wild beating the royal guests and ravaging all decorations. They catch hold of the district magistrate Jim and Captain Sim. Both plead for life before Chakradhar. The mob is calmed down by Chakradhar's effort and workers spare the two officials and disperse. Jim however gets Chakradhar arrested and later sentences him to jail.

Manorama, who has fallen in love with Chakradhar goes to Raja Vishal Singh to plead for his rescue. The old ruler is bewitched at the beauty of Manorama. The latter too is impressed by the modesty and the generous sensibilities of the ruler. "The Raja was in magic spell of Manorama's beauty and she too was charmed by his politeness and the modesty."

The flame of Raja's passion for Manorama is fanned by Vajradhar who takes upon himself the responsibility to arrange the marriage. A seasoned official he uses coaxing and threats to achieve his results and compels the Dewan to agree to marry his daughter to the old ruler. Manorama too does not refuse, she rather willingly marries the old man to squander his wealth as she pleases and to do good to others as she confesses later in the novel.

In the prison Chakradhar sees to it that peace is maintained between the prisoners and the jail officials. But here too he falls prey to officials' ingratitude. The jail inspector is attacked for his brutal behaviour by the prisoners. He is saved by the timely intervention of Chakradhar who is himself injured in the mob fury. Instead of being grateful Jim again charges him for inciting prisoners. On the persuasion of Manorama, Raja Vishal Singh visits the magistrate and requests him to release Chakradhar. Magistrate Jim blatantly refuses to do so. The Raja then pleads to allow

Chakradhar to stay in a hospital where he can be treated for his injury. The magistrate not only refuses but also abuses the Raja. Vishal Singh's royal blood now heats up. He grabs the magistrate and floors him down violently. Soon as he grapples his neck to choke him altogether, the magistrate comes to his senses and at once concedes the request. Chakradhar is then admitted to the city hospital. Subsequently Manorama then secures the release of Chakradhar with the refluence of the Governor. Meanwhile, he has been also acquitted by the court which finds him to have been wronged on false charges.

Tension mounts in Agra where a communal riot flares up on simple provocation during holi festival. A little colour sprinkle on a Muslim incites the Muslims to take revenge on Hindus. Hindus too form their groups and retaliate. Yashodanandan runs from pillar to post of the officialdom to restore peace. But he himself is attacked brutally and dies. His house is set on fire. Ahilya, his adopted daughter is kidnapped. Khwaja, who was a friend of Yashodanandan has been leading the Muslims. He now sinks in remorse at the death of his dearest friend whose daughter he loves as his own and has rather saved five thousand rupees for her marriage. Ironically, it is his son who kidnapped Ahilya. The son too is killed by Ahilya while attempting to rape her. At the news of the riot Chakradhar visits Agra despite his father's disapproval. At Agra he marries Ahilya and brings her along to Jagdishpur from where after some time he leaves for Allahabad,

In Allahabad, Chakradhar devotes to social work and makes some living through writing. Ahilya too publishes one or two articles but later for some reason or the other she prefers to help the husband in writing. A son is born to them who is named Shankhdhar. They live there for about five years. One day a telegram arrives about Manorama's illness. Chakradhar hastens to reach Jagdishpur with his wife and the son. In a dramatic meeting now it is revealed that Ahilya is none but Raja Vishal Singh's daughter, Sukhada who was lost in the fair in Allahabad. It changes the course of Ahilya's life, Raja Vishal Singh had no heir. Shankhdhar, his daughter's son is now declared the heir of the estate. Ahilya gets lost in the luxuries of palace life. She even shows scant interest for her son Shankhdhar who lives mostly with Manorama. The power and authority of the royalty also affects Chakradhar. A person for whom service and help of common men was the mission happens to beat a peasant for just refusing to toe his car. The poor peasant has been so servely beaten that after four days he succumbs to the injury. Chakradhar,

however, soon realizes his guilt and begs forgiveness.

Chakradhar also gets suffocated in the affluent idle life of the palace and decides to leave. For Ahilya who has had the first showers of palace pleasures it becomes difficult to leave. Eventually Chakradhar leaves one night quietly and travels far and wide as a sadhu. He serves the poor and helps them financially. The people think that he gets money through mystic powers. He is now famous as Mahatma Bhagwan Das. He wanders around the holy shrines for about 15 years. His son, Shankhdhar, as he grows up broods about his father and in the manner of Odysseus sets out to search for him. He succeeds after a long travail to discover the father in the garb of an eminent sadhu. Chakradhar who does not agree to accompany the son gives a slip and disappears.

Shankhdhar, a shattered heart measures his way through to his home estate, Jagdishpur. In the way, he happens to see the Hurshpur estate and reminisces his association with the estate in his previous incarnation. He visits the dejected queen Devapriya who has been already widowed twice in her life time. He declares that he was her husband in his previous birth. The queen who suspects him in the beginning, comes to believe his narration of the past life and accepts him as her husband.

She accompanies Shankhdhar as his wife to Jagdishpur. Raja Vishal Singh has been by this time repletely apathetic to the management of the estate. He is engrossed in his sensuous pleasures and discards Manorama. He decides to marry again. Shankhdhar returns home with his beautiful wife whom he introduces as Kamala. The Raja, however, comes to know through Manorama that Kamala is queen Devapriya. He is awfully upset at this revelation. One night Shankhdhar swoons and collapses mysteriously. "Love we shall meet again," he assures Devapriya. "This game will end only when our love shall be free of carnality." Raja Vishal Singh too dies soon after it. In the end Chakradhar joins the family from his long exile. Queen Devapriya continues to rule her estate as tapaswini rani.

The novel is thus full of mystic co-incidences. Its plot is intricately complex through some six sub-plots weilded together. Nevertheless the author has unreasonably lengthened the plot through uncontributory episodes and events. This is the result of his growing love for larger canvas. His unusual delineation of reincarnation with a seriousness of purpose is most uncharacteristic of his thought and philosophy of life. The only criteria that must have prompted him choose such a theme and subject is manifestly his

purpose of entertainment for which he took the readers for granted. The weakness in plot and theme is, however, redeemed in the powerful sweep of characterization. Some critics have found the structure of the novel comparatively loose. But the looseness of the structure seems to be deliberate design of the novel. The author's primary object being to delight his readers, he amassed the mystic happenings in as large a scale as possible and in that he has sought to absorb his reader sumptuously in as much as they are able to suspend their disbelief and rational thinking.

The novel exposes two worlds of Indian society ; the world of the farmers and the world of the kings, princes and zamindars. The farmers are shown capable of uniting and protesting to the exploiters. An illuminating feature of the novel is its powerful commentary on Hindu-Muslim fanaticism which has caused endless dissensions leading to deaths of innocent people. It is as true today as it was in the early thirties. The communal riots like that of Agra where a devout social worker such as Yashodanandan has to sacrifice his life are not uncommon today. The author has not only drawn the attention of readers to this senseless actions of the two communities but has also cautioned that the two races can live together amicably only by shelving the misnotions about each other. He wrote in one of his essays entitled *Hindu-Muslim Unity* about it emphatically, "What is paramount is... that we should remove the false history (about each other) from our minds and build our opinions on the basis of the country and the time." The world of the kings is exposed in ridiculous voluptuousness and inhuman exploitation. The hero of the novel, Chakradhar has both strengths and weaknesses in his character. He is a brilliant post-graduate of the university and has genuine love for the people. Even the Muslims marvel at the spirit of courage when he defends the cow from being slaughtered at the cost of his life. He exerts formidable influence among the people. But then he believes in compromise and withdrawal and would like to realise his ends without harming the either side. He is a successful diplomat for which despite his resurgent views Raja Vishal Singh finds him useful to protect his interests. He supports the cause of prisoners in the Jail at the same time ensuring that the jail officials are not harmed. His decision not to marry Manorama even though the latter announces her love on several occasions seems to be rational and is fit tribute to his character. At the age of thirteen Manorama is not expected to form any sound view in matters of marriage and Chakradhar, her teacher, would not exploit her ignorance. His love to serve mankind is nevertheless his sovereign

mission and whenever he departs from this his conscience pricks him. Premchand considered him as an ideal character. He wrote about it to Dr. Indranath Madan in one of his letters in December 1934. Premchand's women characters are generally marked with two distinguishing traits of loving the ideal hero and sympathising with the suffering masses. It is also true of Manorama who loves the idealist of Chakradhar as Sophia did of Vinay. She is not idealist herself and represents her class. She marries Raja Vishal Singh who is almost her father's age, as much to become the queen as to help Chakradhar. Ahilya whose life is spent in separation either from parents or the husband is above the common women of the time. She has original idea and thinks about the uplift of the society seriously. She has also the talent to write and her articles are readily published in the journals.

Tantamount to royalty Premchand has also portrayed the middle class people of his time very colourfully. All such characters come alive in the novel true to actions and motives in real life. The most impressive character in this category is Vajradhar, the father of Chakradhar who would lick the feet of feudal power and the government officials to any extent to achieve his ends. He is a shrewd materialist and an unscrupulous official. His concern for social respect does not allow him to permit his son to marry Ahilya. But once he comes to know about her lineage he runs wild in delight and takes pride to be her father-in-law. Premchand as such took unusual interest in the characterisation with as realistic a brush as possible. His views about novel are primarily concerned with characterisation...“I consider novel,” he said “as the portraiture of human character. The basic function of the novel is to throw light on the character and to unravel the mysteries about him.”

There have been diverse opinions about the merit of the novel among Hindi critics. Nand Dularay Bajpai who considered it to be an experimental work of the author felt that Premchand has not been successful in his experiment. Critics like Dr. Ramratan Bhatnagar, however, have argued that the novel is one of the best works of Premchand. Nagri Pracharini Sabha, Varanasi honoured the author with an award of Rs. 200 for the novel.

Nirmala had been serialised from November 1925 to November 1926 in *Chand* and was published later by the Gilani Electric Press of Lahore. It was written almost the same time Premchand wrote *Kayakalp* and is the output of author's crucial days of economic tension when all his earning was being swallowed by the press. He continued the tradition of his earlier works as *Sewa Sadan* and *Premashram* in this novel too but with a marked difference. The

moralising suggestion of widow homes (ashrams) for rehabilitating widows as indicated earlier is not repeated. The novel also develops and ends on an extended plane of realistic depiction; it has a tragic end, moves the reader compulsively to witness the tragedy of an ideal hapless woman just for the capricious suspicion of the husband. The husband here is not the hero of lofty ideals like Vinay or the fickle-minded youth like Ramanath of *Ghaban*. He is a typical product of middle class social ethos for whom wealth and the wife are synonymous and in that he approximates to some degree with Gajadhar of *Sewa Sadan*. The evil institution of dowry, however, continues here too. It constitutes the seed of the woman tragedy. There is no widow marriage in it as the earlier novels. In course of time Premchand, it seems, came to realise that the mere remarriage of widows was no solution to eliminate the age-long malaise in the society. Dr. Kamal Kishore Goianka recently produced a letter in the October 1978 issue of *Sarika* written by Premchand to Dr. Raghuvir Singh in which Premchand makes it explicit : “I had dislodged Hindu woman from her ideal by showing marriage (remarriage) in the novel (*Prema*). I was young at that time and the spirit of reform was overwhelming...”

But it is significant to note that the problem of widows which Premchand brought to the focus way back in 1904-5 was no less formidable an issue in the Indian society. Some twenty years later Gandhiji drew attention to this situation when he pointed out that in 1921 there were as many as 3,29,076 widows in the country under sixteen of whom 11,892 were less than five years old while 85,037 were between five and ten. It was, therefore, a great social concern of Premchand to raise this issue in his novels which were not merely his realistic narratives but also profound treatises for immediate social reform.

The theme of *Nirmala* is the problem of dowry and unmatching marriage. The story is built primarily around three families, Udaibhanu, Totaram and the Sinhas. The main story concerns Nirmala and Totaram. Nirmala's marriage poses problem just because her mother Kalayani has no dowry to give in her daughter's marriage.

Udaibhanu has two daughters; Nirmala and Krishna. He settles the marriage of Nirmala with Bhuvan Mohan, the son of Balchandra Sinha. Udaibhanu now prepares for the marriage when suddenly he is attacked by a bad character, Matai and is killed. The boy's father Balchandra is a money spinner. He now calls off the marriage since he has no hope to get dowry. His son Bhuvan Mohan is no less greedy than his father. He aspires to marry

where he must get about a lakh in dowry. And like Suman of *Sewa Sadan*, Nirmala too is tied with an unequal or unmatching husband, Totaram because the mother Kalayani considers not worthwhile to spend one thousand rupees over one daughter alone. Though there is another offer of a graduate boy of suitable age who is fairly placed in printing profession yet the mother prefers the thirty-five year old Totaram whose sole credential is that he is a well-to-do lawyer and has no demand for dowry. It hardly matters that he is a widower and has three sons, Mansaram, Jiyaram and Siyaram. The eldest is of sixteen years and is almost of Nirmala's age. Totaram is the discovery of the priest Moteram. Totaram has a widow sister Rukmini who grows jealous of Nirmala when her brother hands over the management of the house to the wife to please her. Nirmala who begins to show interest in the house develops affection for Mansaram from whom she takes lessons in English. The boy too finds his lost mother in her. Aware of his waning age and rather guilty about it Totaram grows suspicious of this development and decides to send the son to a boarding house. Meanwhile all his attempts to impress Nirmala fail. All his quixotic efforts to look brave and handsome before the wife make her all the more weary of him. "She never desired to show her beauty, her youth to him because he had no eyes to see them."

Mansaram discovers the misgivings of his father and leaves the house for boarding house. He falls there ill and gets delirious fits. Eventually he is admitted to hospital where he dies. Nirmala is moved by the apparent repentance that Totaram displays: "I have done great injustice to you. Please forgive me." The story speeds up faster after Mansaram's death. Totaram goes bankrupt, his practice fails, Jiyaram who steals Nirmala's ornaments commits suicide out of shame. Nirmala gives birth to a daughter. But now she develops bitterness in her behaviour. The temperament of Nirmala and Totaram makes a contrasting change. While the former becomes all submissive Nirmala grows acidly cynical and Siyaram the youngest son of Totaram falls a prey to her chagrin. Herein the author points a ruthless picture of stepmother's behaviour of which partly he himself had been a victim. The story then mounts on a tragic dimension. Siyaram runs away from home to become a sadhu. Dr. Bhuvan Mohan Sinha whose wife Sudha is Nirmala's friend commits suicide when his infatuation with Nirmala is exposed. Incidentally, he is the same person who had years ago refused to marry Nirmala on the issue of dowry. Totaram leaves house in search of the son. Nirmala then falls ill seriously. She has intuition that she won't survive. She

has now only one worry, it is the worry of her daughter's marriage. She wishes her daughter should not be the victim of unmatching marriage like her and pleads before her death, "Let my daughter remain unmarried. You may kill her but please do not tie her with any undeserving husband..." After her death the corpse lies before the house. The people worry as to who should perform the cremation. Just at that moment a haggard oldman arrives on the scene; this is Totaram her husband.

The novel is thus a vivid exposure of middle class Indian society. It presents the tragic stories of three women, Rukmini, Sudha and Nirmala. Money forms the reigning leitmotif of the novel which itself emerges as a tragedy of dowry. The author has shown a substantial spirit of endurance and moderation in Nirmala who despite her ill treatment by Rukmini, suspicion of her husband and sufferances on account of Jiyaram's behaviour does not revolt like Suman of *Sewa Sadan* to abandon the house and take to independent life. All women cannot revolt and are doomed to accept a life not of their choice. The author didn't seek to sidetrack this reality and eventually he is more realistic than in his former novels in this regard. The plot of the novel is compact. All situations are handled and connected with the main story of Nirmala. The novel presents a distinct identity of a seasoned hand although the author himself felt that he handled it very casually. A few years later he wrote to Keshoram Sabbarwal, his translator in Japan, "I have recently written two minor novels—*Nirmala* and *Pratigya*. I have no claim in either of any artistic achievement. In them, in some measure, social evils have been exposed..."

Premchand had now remodelled his earlier novel *Prema* published some twenty years ago from Allahabad. The new book was titled as *Pratigya*. With the spectacular success of *Nirmala* the editor of *Chand* had been pressing for another novel to be serialised in his journal. Premchand felt necessary to meet the demand and hastened to complete it for publication. The novel was serialised in *Chand* from January to November 1927. Premchand was in the meanwhile finding it very difficult to manage the family. He had almost no income from the press.

VII

Second Sojourn in Lucknow : Editor of Madhuri

There was no alternative to look for some job to keep the family going. Incidentally he received in February that year an invitation from Vishanlal Bhargava who wanted him to edit the prestigious Hindi journal *Madhuri* published from Lucknow. He was offered a salary of two hundred rupees. Premchand accepted the offer readily as it was no longer possible to subsist on the press. He worked with the Naval Kishore Press, the publishers of the journal, *Madhuri* for about five years. It was a fairly long span of time of a financially settled life after his relinquishment of government job. But then this period too was full of turmoils for his wife's participation in politics and his own fiery writing against the foreign rule. Even so it was again in Lucknow where he conceived and wrote his monumental works; *Ghaban*, *Karmabhoomi* and the famous short stories that were to be precious possessions of Hindi literature in future.

Premchand reached Lucknow on 15 February 1927. His family joined him in July. For some time he was in-charge of the text book department of the press. Here too he showed his mettle and prepared some of the best text books for children in Urdu and Hindi. He also wrote on the children's education wherein he displayed most original ideas about this neglected aspect in the educational system. His own books were in school and college syllabus way back since 1916.

Shifting from text book department Premchand later took over the editing of *Madhuri*. While editing the journal he published his short story *Moteram Shastri* in the January issue of 1928 for which the journal ran into trouble. The story exposed in its scathy caricature the hollowness of a quack (vaidya). It exploded volcanically the quack's hypocrisy and deception to the people. A prominent vaidya of Lucknow Pandit Shaligram Shastri who claimed himself as an accomplished doctor felt that the caricature was aimed to malign him. He filed a defamation suit against the editor, publisher and the printer of the

journal. Though the case ended up soon it had a scandalous effect on the readers. To stir renewed interest among the readers Premchand published the news about the defamation suit which caught the eyes of even those who had missed the story. The popularity of the scandal proved more advantageous to *Madhuri*. Premchand re-created this character in some of his future works and painted him with ruthless caricature.

After its serialisation in *Chand* which concluded in November, 1927, *Pratigya* (The Pledge) was published by Premchand himself at Saraswati Press, Varanasi. The Urdu version of the novel was published under the title *Bewa*. Although the fabric of its original model, *Ham Khurm- Wa-Ham Sawab* or *Prema* continues to be same there are some differences with regard to characters and situations. It has a happy ending unlike the former.

The theme of *Pratigya* is the rehabilitation of widows. Amritrai, a widower and Dannath are two close friends who happen to love the same girl Prema. One day Amritrai attends a lecture at the Arya Samaj Mandir in Agra about the miserable plight of the widows. The Arya Samaj leader makes a moving appeal for widow remarriage. Amritrai is very much touched with the harrowing sufferances of the widows that the leader has described and pledges to marry a widow although he has been already engaged with Prema who is the sister of his deceased wife. Since the death of her sister Prema had also decided to marry Amritrai. But Amritrai now breaks off the engagement and persuades Dannath to marry her. Prema's father has no choice but to accept Dannath as his son-in-law.

Amritrai opens a widow home (ashram) where he devotes to the welfare of widows. Although he does not marry any widow yet he is satisfied with the fulfilment of his mission in devoting life for the well-being of widows who are generally discarded by the society.

Prema's dear friend Poorna has become a widow. Her husband is drowned on holi occasion. She is a charming girl full of youthful aspirations. She comes to live with Prema's father Badri Prasad at the request of Prema. Badri Prasad gives her affection as her own father. But Kamala Prasad, Prema's brother is lewdly charmed by Poorna's beauty and makes advances. Kamala Prasad's wife, Sumitra is a beautiful, generous woman. She urges her husband to be reasonable and give up immoral way of his living. But Kamala Prasad is bent upon his sensuous gratification. One day while escorting her to Prema's house he attempts to molest her. Poorna exerts a severe blow on him and frees herself from his clutches. She is, however, in precarious dilemma

since she cannot live anywhere ; neither at Badri Prasad's house nor in her deceased husband's family. At this critical time Amritrai comes to her rescue. He offers her an honourable place at the ashram.

Apart from the optimistic note with which the novel ends there are few coincidences in it. Nor are there repeat widow marriages of earlier version. Similarly it has been spared the grimness of suicides and deaths of the original.

Premchand was now writing his great social novel on the middle class life *Ghaban* (Embezzlement). He was already famous as a noted Hindi novelist in the country. The great emerging writers of the time looked to him for their ideal. Among them was Pandit Banarasi Das Chaturvedi who pressed Premchand several times to let his stories be translated into English and edited by C.F. Andrews. The latter was too, no less keen for the English translation of Premchand's stories. In November 1928 Tarachand Roy who had more fame abroad than in his country and was a living authority in German language and literature noted the eminence of Premchand in one of his letters "I have no need to state that you (Premchand) are the greatest Hindi writer of modern age." At this time his story *Muktimarg* had been translated into Japanese and published in the prominent journal, *Kaizo* which had a circulation of one lakh at that time. The Japanese readers expressed desire to read more translations of the author's works. Premchand wrote to his translator in his modest humility, "What has a poor Hindi writer to offer the developed country like Japan !" His stories also began to appear in English translation. Premchand loved to be translated and kept the cutting of the translated publications arduously though he was always sceptical of their exact rendering into other languages and feared they might be distortion of the original. Some of the important stories which Premchand published during 1927-28 are *Actress*, *Bade Babu*, *Mandir* (The Temple) *Mange Ki Ghadi* (The Borrowed Watch), *Abhilasha* (Desire), *Istifa* (Resignation), *Darogaji* (The Police Inspector), and *Moteram Shastri*. Earlier in 1926 he had published *Kazaki* in which he had recounted the childhood reminiscences.

Premchand's daughter, Kamala was about 16 and of marriageable age according to the custom of the time. On account of Premchand's frequent transfers and nagging financial problems Kamala could not receive higher education. Also Premchand seems to be a realist in this regard for he knew it would be difficult to find a groom for the girl of higher education which would only add to his problems. Premchand had to look for a suitable match.

He didn't have to face much problems; the boy's parents were too honoured to learn that the girl was the daughter of the famous Hindi writer. There were some oblique hints, however, for handsome dowry by the boy's parents. But the boy Vasudev Prasad was of radical ideas who firmly told the parents, "I accept the marriage but please remember that the family where I am betrothed is not ruined." Premchand who received a copy of this letter was very much impressed. He wrote about the wedding settlement to Nigam on 21 February, 1929. "You will be glad to know that my daughter's marriage has been settled in a prosperous family in Sagar district... the boy studies in B.A." The marriage was solemnised at Lamahi.

He was now relieved of the father's responsibility. Already there was some financial security as the editor of *Madhuri*. In literary world he was already acclaimed as the greatest novelist of the time. The writers, established and budding, looked to him for publication of their works. But all this did not influence him with any sensibility of power and position. He continued to be as simple, sincere and frank as ever. He was always in search of new talents and missed no opportunity to promote whenever they deserved. Having himself suffered in life he was moved to see others in difficulty. He always felt that a talent might die if it was not helped in its budding stage by one who could. He helped such persons even with money. For his simple nature and generosity he was also deceived at times by fake writers. And among such phoney writers was one Krishna Kumar Mukhopadhyay who claimed to be the only son of a rich doctor. He lavished great praise of Premchand's works in his letters to the author. With plagiarised excerpts from Western writers he gave an impression of great learning and appreciation of literature and pretended himself a writer. Having won the confidence of Premchand he began to exact money from the author with made up tales of his problems. He even stayed in Premchand's house in Lucknow and later moved to a hotel on the author's expenses. He bought clothes and jewellery for his fiancée on Premchand's account. Premchand's kindness cost him more than four hundred rupees. After cheating for quite some time the man wrote about his wickedness and begged to be forgiven. Marriage of the daughter in the meanwhile also relieved the mother Shivrani Devi. She now began to devote her time to the works of the Congress, raising donations, organising meetings and working for the uplift of the women.

It was some time during early 1929 when Jainendra Kumar who himself distinguished as an eminent novelist later, came in contact with Premchand.

He was just aspiring to be a writer then and had sent a story for publication in *Madhuri*. Premchand did not appreciate it and sent it back. Jainendra sent another story which was accepted by Premchand for the special number of *Madhuri*. It was no small joy for a budding writer to be published in *Madhuri* more so being chosen from among others by Premchand. He was fired with strong emotions to meet the editor one day personally. During his visit to Kumbh fair in Allahabad he went to Lucknow to fulfil his dream. But the image of Premchand that Jainendra had formed from the readings of his works was shattered when he met the great writer face to face. He must have imagined him a highly sophisticated personality full of egoism and air beyond the reach of a youth who had just begun to scribe. Wrapped in a coarse shawl with his hair dishevelled Premchand who stood before him in an ordinary dhoti was so “simple, ordinary and of rustic outlook” that the adolescent writer could not believe his eyes. Still unbelievable was it when Premchand himself rushed to help Jainendra lift his suitcase.

VIII

Hans : Champion of Political Awakening

At the bottom of all his writing that portrayed vigorously the exploitation of farmers, workers or the women, Premchand's prime concern was the country's freedom. For him freedom was much more than that the word signified apparently. It was to eliminate not only foreign rule from the country but all those evils that had paralysed the life in the country, economically, socially and culturally. He highlighted the wretched conditions of the age-long tortured segments of Indian society and called for protest against foreign rule in his novels and stories. But all the time he was looking forward to a wider media to propagate his views about country's freedom and the social reform. With the setting up of his own press a way was opened to proceed toward this objective.

With all limitations of financial resources and hard-pressed time to spare from his literary writing he finally launched with courage the Hindi monthly journal *Hans* on March 6, 1930 from Saraswati Press in Varanasi. The name of the journal was suggested by the great Hindi poet Jaya Shankar Prasad. Premchand continued to work in Lucknow and fed the paper regularly. To manage at two fronts in addition to his creative writing Premchand had to work strenuously. He had to write for bulk of the pages for *Hans*, concentrate on his novel in hand (*Ghaban*) and write, edit and produce the journal *Madhuri*. Quite often he had also to do some travelling for his firm. Over and above he earmarked some two hours daily for Congress.

Writing about the national resurgence for freedom Premchand said in the very first issue of *Hans*. "It is a matter of great providence for *Hans* that it is born at a time when a new age is in the offing in the country; India is today restless to be free from the shackles of slavery."

The political scene in the country, in the meanwhile had converged to a galactic animation. Two years ago the Simon Commission had been boycotted all over the country and Gandhiji had resumed his civil

disobedience campaign in Bardoli. Some eighty-seven thousand peasants of Bardoli where the government had ruthlessly raised taxation by twentytwo percent on the poor farmers, refused to pay tax. It let loose a reign of torture and oppression of the government which robbed the farmers of their cattle and even the thatched huts. The country was again united to register its protest against such tyranny. Following Gandhiji's call the whole of India observed a total *hartal* in sympathy with the peasants of Bardoli. The entire country was paralysed and the government was compelled to repeal the increase in taxes and return the confiscated possessions of the farmers. This was no uncommon victory of the people of the country. Swaraj was now in the offing. Gandhiji was writing then in his sabarmati Ashram the historic declaration of Independence of India. Premchand had actively watched all these developments. He spiritedly defended Gandhiji and sought to generate a nationwide awakening among the people.

Manifestly Premchand's sovereign aim was to educate and inform the Hindi readers through *Hans* as *Young India* was seeking to do among English-knowing people. *Hans* was subscribed to at once by two thousand readers. Soon the journal was being read in most parts of the country and even abroad. The maiden issue of the journal featured Jaya Shankar Prasad's story *Mahuva* and Premchand's stories *Julus* and *Parmeswar*.

Hindi journals at the time were harping on unearthly idealism. *Hans* brought about for the first time the much needed harmony of idealism with that of realism. It not only commented upon the socio-political topics but also focussed the healthy literature being written of the time. It promoted the new writers and published the best of the established writers. It was frank and fearless of any influence whatsoever.

The multitude of literature published during some seven years of publication of *Hans* is a subject of research and investigation today. The eminent persons who constituted the board of editors for *Hans* included; Gandhiji, Purshottam Das Tandon, Maithili Sharan Gupta, Ramnaresh Tripathi, Syed Sajjad Zahir, Dr Kalidas Nag, C. Rajagopalachari, etc. It was a true nationalist paper. It combined the literary excellence and the wide national awakening. At a time when the people's faith was wavering for the Swarajya movement, Premchand explained at length the true meaning and significance of Swarajya. In April 1930 issue of *Hans* he wrote, "There is no doubt that the Swarajya movement is the movement of the poor. It is the movement", he said, "of the workers, farmers and poor multitudes and was

bound to succeed because the masses were behind it.” Premchand watched and studied very minutely the nationwide leadership that Gandhiji was giving for the freedom movement. He explained with foresight the points of view of Gandhiji and the wisdom and rationale that was behind each act of the national leader. Premchand wrote,...“Mahatma Gandhi has made it clear that we are not seeking Swarajya for positions and authority. We want Swarajya for those silent, voiceless people who are plunged in wretched poverty everyday... Our mission will be fulfilled only when the condition of our wretched, starving, clothless people improve.”

Premchand attacked the government for all its anti-people actions. He exhorted the educated youth to realise that the money collected from the poor was being spent by the government and its agents for their luxury. He called upon them to ponder over the national honour and selfless valour of others who were dying for the country. No one need teach them about their role in the country’s freedom. “A duckiing need be taught how to swim.” Premchand also ridiculed snobbery of the English speaking elite who were dying to ape western culture indiscriminately. The same attack blazes in the most of the three dozen letters he wrote in chaste English during his life time. Premchand in fact could not stand anything that could not be the possession of the masses.

In March 1930 Gandhiji held the famous march to Dandi, a coastal town in the present State of Gujarat to break the salt laws. He broke the salt law on 5 April 1930 and made salt himself, which was the government’s sole monopoly. Millions of people followed Gandhiji and made salt along the sea-coasts of the country. It was an immense victory of Gandhiji and of Indian people. The Dandi march itself was organised to draw attention of the world and had been very wisely conceived; it was covered by the world press and soon all conscientious people around the world learnt about India’s agony. Premchand wrote in the April issue of *Hans* strongly defending the move of Gandhiji. “We marvel at the wisdom of Mahatmaji... God knows from where he discovered the salt-tax which has inflamed the entire country within no time. This is a tax which even the poorest has to pay... As has been noted, Premchand wrote fearlessly and was least affected by the terror of government tyranny. He wrote hittingly about the ‘danda theory’ of the government in his article “Danda Shastra” exposing the wild frustration of the government itself in desperately trying to suppress the people by beating and imprisonment. He did not spare his own countrymen if he found them

slipping off the grounds of national interest. He analysed the minute details of the Round Table conferences. In one of his articles in November 1932 he raised his voice against the false propaganda of the Hindu-Muslim differences reported to have been made by one of the delegates in London. "...We are equally afraid of the fake leaders of India now in London. If these people fail to announce boldly our unity and demolish the real causes of differences, then we are forced to say that the coming generation will never forget their obvious meanness, the blood drying in our poverty will be written in the registers of their crime and they will be responsible for each nail in the coffin of our progress."

For its free and frank comments on politics and social economic conditions in the country *Hans* landed in trouble within six months of its appearance. The Government demanded a security of one thousand rupees. Premchand had to rush to Varanasi to pay the security. This was a despairing experience for him. He wrote to Nigam, "I am thinking of stopping the journal and also the press with this. I will decide about it later. I study the situation in Banaras (Varanasi). Paradoxically he continued both; the press and the journal as both had become a part of his life.

But despite the high standard of the paper and its wide acceptance among the educated Hindi readers Premchand had to confront a great deal of economic hardship to sustain the paper. The solid financial backing through advertisement was then not as easy as today. Then there was humiliation by the government. At times Premchand was also depressed by the apathy of readers. He wrote in June 1931, "'*Hans* did not enter the field of literature with the permission of readers. It had (entered) to achieve a mission in the area of literature and it will make its attempt to achieve that... the ideal of journalism is not commercial.'" That the journal cost him very dearly is evident when he wrote a few years later to Nigam with deep sorrow that whatever he had earned from his literary writings had been lost in the journals. Premchand was disillusioned, it seems by the Hindi readers' cold response to *Hans* within one year of its publication. Much before he expressed this unhappiness to his readers in June 1931, he had informed Shriram Sharma about it in his letter of 9 February 1931, "...With this thought in mind I had launched *Hans*. My plan was to have a peaceful life at home, a little literary work, editing of this journal and to enjoy the company of simple farmers. But I got so little cooperation from the readers that I have to run it vainly just with the remote hope, which never dies, that ultimately sacrifice is

not unrewarded.”

While Premchand was active with his pen, his wife, Shivrani Devi extended an equal consort in the national movement. She took active part in the work of Swadeshi movement and courted arrest on 9 November 1930. Her account of the arrest and surging sentiments of the arresting policemen is presented in a touching narrative in her book *Premchand Ghar Mein*. It was on November 9, when Premchand was away to Varanasi, that she was summoned hurriedly to the Congress office (in Lucknow). As per the programme of the Congress she went with other women volunteers for picketing of the shops that sold the foreign goods. After a while all the volunteers were placed under arrest and half a dozen policemen conducted them to the jail. One of the policemen could not resist his emotions of tribute to these selfless women volunteers who were happily going to jail for the sake of the country. “Mataji”, the policeman said, “We get here some twentytwo to twenty-three rupees but if any one offers us even ten rupees elsewhere we would happily give up this sinful service.” Shivrani Devi who was quite moved with such sentiments of the policeman consoled him that he was after all performing his official duty. “Mataji”, the policeman said again, “If you were not so generous why should you come to jail...It hurts us to see that those mothers and sisters whom we should worship, we have to conduct to prison for the sake of our bread.”

She was sentenced for two months. Premchand who visited her in the jail after his return from Varanasi had all along felt that he would be arrested any day and in fact had looked forward for that ‘glorious’ day. He was quaintly delighted to see that his wife had taken the lead over him. “She has risen in my esteem hundred times”, he said.

Shivrani Devi did not sit idle after release from the jail and even though she had lost her health considerably she organised an active protest against the ill treatment of the C class prisoners who were inhumanly starved and denied warm clothes in winter. The authorities had to finally concede the demand.

In the middle of 1931 the government again demanded security from *Hans*. The objection was raised for the story *Hatyara* (The Killer) published in the journal. It was, however, revoked at the instance of the district collector, Pannalal who was himself a litterateur. A few months after the proprietor of the Naval Kishore Press, Vishan Narayan Bhargava died in Madras. His successors did not have any interest in the promotion of the journal. On 12

January 1931 Premchand wrote to Jainendra, "Let us see how the work goes on here. One doesn't know whether *Madhuri* shall survive. I have no hope for its publication."

Premchand continued for some time with the book depot section of the press and left the organisation in November 1931. On repeated requests of Jainendra Kumar, he visited Delhi which was his maiden visit to the town. Soon after his return from Delhi he had to attend a function of Hindi Sahitya Parishad in Patna where a big ovation was awaiting him.

During this phase Premchand published about a dozen stories which are immortal today in the annals of Hindi short story. In them we find the author at his apogean height of success. There is excellence everywhere in construction, style and choice of the themes. In these stories the author leaves an indelible impress and a unique individual mark of his craftsmanship. The stories include *Algyojha*, *Gulli Danda*, *Ahuti* (Oblation), *Juloos* (The Procession), *Maiku*, *Poos Ki Raat* (Night in Winter), *Samar Yatra* (March to Battle), *Do Bailon Ki Katha* (A Tale of Two Bullocks), *Prema* (Inspiration), etc.

Algyojha depicts the reunion of a disintegrated family. Raghu's stepmother illtreats him but he loves his cousins. After his marriage, his wife Mulia picks up a quarrel and separates from the family. Raghu still continues to love his cousins. Suddenly Raghu dies and his stepbrother Kedar begins to look after the family. He also looks after Mulia. Finally he marries Mulia and the family is again united. As in the *Bade Ghar Ki Beti*, the author has endeavoured to show here that the joint family system is of social and economic necessity in the present social order and it can be well maintained by mutual goodwill.

Gulli Danda is not merely a dainty rendering of nostalgic childhood joy of playing 'gulli danda', it is an eloquent criticism of sham wall of power and position that separates man from man. The story is written in first person point of view. The author was defeated by Gaya in the game of gulli danda in childhood. Yet he had not accepted the defeat for which he was slapped. Years pass, Gaya continues family tradition to be cobbler while the author becomes the district engineer. In a chance encounter author urges him to play gulli danda. Although he can defeat the author he allows himself to be defeated since he has no courage to defeat the district engineer. True game is only possible among equals and friends. The author cannot have that lost friendship since the wall of his position stands between himself and Gaya, the cobbler. *Ahuti* and *Juloos* overwhelm with inveterate nationalism. *Ahuti*

celebrates oblation of one's life to the national movement for country's freedom. The heroine of *Ahuti*, Roopmani loves Anand for his prosperity and attractive personality. Her heart betakes a change when she sees Vishambhar devoting to national works in a dedicated spirit. Vishambhar is poor, doesn't possess any charming personality. But Roopmani is moved by his selfless service for the country. Finally when she learns that Vishambhar has plunged in the national movement and has dedicated all his life for it she gives up Anand once for all and joins Vishambhar to be his partner. *Juloos* depicts the story of martyrdom. The elderly leader of the ideal of Gandhiji does not allow violence to take place. Leader of the procession is Ibrahim Ali who assures the police official that there won't be any violence and urges him to allow the procession to pass through. The police official Birbal does not allow. When the processionists refuse to budge back he beats Ibrahim Ali and crushes him with his horse. Ibrahim Ali asks the processionists to withdraw. He wanted to win public sympathy for the Swarajya movement and he has won it. Even the people who ridiculed him in the beginning joined the march. Ibrahim Ali succumbs to the assault and dies within three days. A big procession is organised for martyr. In the meanwhile Birbal's wife Mitthanbai scolds the husband for his anti people behaviour. The procession of the third day in which people even the women join to pay homage to the martyr, changes the heart of Birbal. He changes the course of his life and goes to the widow of Ibrahim Ali to confess and beg forgiveness. When Mitthanbai reaches Ibrahim Ali's house she is surprised to find her husband. Now he is also with her. There is glow of joy and pride and affection on her face for the husband this time. The women characters of the story take a lead over the male counterparts in the freedom struggle. Premchand's cardinal theme of social reform permeates very movingly in *Maiku*. In the story the volunteers make all out effort to free drunkards from the habit of drinking. The hardened drunkard like Maiku who assaults the volunteers ruthlessly in order to cruise his way to the wineshop suddenly changes his mind and is filled with remorse. He not only gives up drinking but also to do penance breaks the wine bottles to destroy the source of drinking. 'Poos' is the bitter cold month which falls around January. In *Poos Ki Raat* the author gives a naked picture of poverty of India's farmers. Haiku, the poor farmer has only three rupees which is snatched away by the money lender under threat. He goes to watch his field with standing crop against the wild beasts in the bitter night of *Poos*. He has no warm clothes to protect in the chilly night and

shivers with the dog. The wild beasts devour his field but he has no strength in the cold to rise and chase them away. Even the dog, Jabra, keeps quiet after a bit of barking. The field is ravaged till morning. Yet Haiku is happy that he will not have to stay any longer in the bitter cold to protect his field. It is the old woman, Nohri in *Samar Yatra* who demonstrates the unflinching courage to face the police attack in the public meeting for satyagrah movement. She has heard the name of Gandhiji and has also seen him. The poor old woman wants to do something for the country. She welcomes the volunteers and when the police cordons the villagers none but she remains in the assembly. People are stunned to see her spirit and courage. She scolds the police inspector and lends strength to her husband Kodai Chaudhry to take part in the movement. The people rejoin. Nohri leads the procession of the volunteers and the villagers bid warm farewell to the volunteers. The story thus testifies the mass uprising in which common men and women of the village have participated. In *Do Ballon Ki Katha* the author has made a successful experiment with animal characters and has brought out colourfully their sentiments of envy, anger, charity and devotion. Jhoori, the vegetable grower, has two bullocks named, Hira and Moti. Serving the same master and living under the same roof they have developed an inseparable friendship. Once Jhoori sends them to his in-laws for use in the ploughing. The bullocks somehow reach the new place but runaway from there in the night and when Jhoori gets up in the morning he finds them standing with mud slashed on his door. It outrages Jhoori's wife who stops their fodder. Next they are again taken to Jhoori's in-laws' house where again they are beaten, starved and ill-treated. Though they are strong enough they do not protest by violence. "It is not permitted in our religion", says Hira. The two bullocks are, however, gratefully compassionate to the little daughter of Bhairon who cheerfully gives them each a chapati. When they struggle to free she even unfastens their big ropes. The bullocks run away and devour a farm. They are, however, caught and locked in the cattle pound. Moti breaks the wall. All the animals flee except Hira, who is tied with a big rope. Moti does not desert his friend. Both are finally auctioned to a butcher. They escape from him and reach Jhoori's house where his wife now kisses them with affection. The story as such provides an allegorical suggestion. It propagates clemency towards animal stock. *Prema* is partly autobiographical. It depicts how the notorious student, Suryaprakash who reforms himself and rises in life to become the deputy commissioner of the district. The story also portrays the ideal relation

between the teacher and the taught.

When Premchand published his story collection *Samar Yatra* which included *Ahuti* it was confiscated by the government. The stories of the collection had penetratingly described oppression and tyranny of the British rulers on the poor masses.

IX

Ghaban

In *Ghaban* (1931) Premchand partly returns to the theme of *Sewa Sadan*. Suman of the latter novel brought tragic turn in her married life for her lust of luxurious living, her desire to live beyond the means. Jalpa of *Ghaban* brings tragedy for her lust of jewellery. But whereas Suman's husband is frank enough to confess his limitation, Jalpa's husband Ramanath freakishly conceals it landing himself and his family in tragic consequences. It is thus the tragic story of man's folly and woman's hazardous love for jewellery. It is the last in the hierarchy of Premchand's novels written on the themes of lower middle class families.

But between *Ghaban* and *Sewa Sadan* is the span of twelve years and during this while Premchand's concern had extended much beyond the miniature family problems, he was not passive to the various national events that had animated the country against foreign rule. He had a passionate eye to arrest the contemporaneity in his writing and eventually the latter part of the novel displays the influence of the converging political movements in the country. Some critics have suggested that the political culmination in the end of the novel is mere a patch work to link the domestic story with that of the national. They find obvious cleavage between the two parts of the work. Such an opinion is based on utter misapprehension of the novel. Far from such failure, the author has evolved his story in a natural sequence in which the latter growth in the novel forms an organic part of the whole. The novel was commenced after the publication of *Pratigya* in 1927. It was still being written at the hour of drafting of Declaration of Independence of India on 26 January, 1930 and the salt satyagraha of Gandhiji in which the country had demonstrated its unstinted support to the leader's policies. During this time and after imprisonment of national leaders, active participation of people in the Swadesh and Swaraj movements, the Meerut conspiracy, Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutt's dare devil attempt to throw bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi to demonstrate that the people of India were not asleep, death of Jatin Das in Lahore jail, the animated movements of

nationalists, round table conference, ruthless suppression of the pa riots and the treacherous practice of the police to implicate innocent people particularly freedom fighters for death punishments had all cumulatively converged on the national scene which no skillful writer could ignore in making best use in his work. His wife too had taken active role in the national movement and he himself had written fearlessly about these developments in his columns. In fact, Premchand could have been accused had he remained blind to all these. Incorporation of political picture is as such a strength rather than a weakness in the novel.

Ghaban is the first novel after *Sewa Sadan* in which the author took comparatively longer time to write. Also it appeared comparatively at a longer interval than its preceding publication; between the publication of *Pratigya* and *Ghaban* there is a gap of four years. The work was apparently obstructed due to his full-time involvement in the editing of *Madhuri*, preparing text book for students, launching of *Hans*, writing for his own and other papers and the marriage of his daughter, Kamala. So like all his other works it is also the product amidst overwhelming busy schedule.

The story of the novel opens in rainy season. At the outset the heroine falls in love with a necklace (*Chandrahara*) in her childhood innocence, which is the very cause of all her disaster.

Jalpa's father, Deendayal had three sons who however did not survive. Jalpa is the fourth and the only surviving child of the fond parents. During one of her childhood days, her father (Deendayal) buys a necklace (*Chandrahara*) for her mother. Jalpa insists that she must also have a necklace. She is not pleased over the toy-necklace her parents buy to appease her. She is bent upon owning a real, golden necklace like her mother's. To get the real necklace she must wait till her wedding day and the mother tells her, "Your's will come from your in-laws, home." And after seven years the day of her wedding also arrives. She is married to Ramanath, the eldest son of Munshi Dayanath. Dayanath is a clerk of fifty rupees salary in the revenue office. Being conscientious he has not earned any money extra in bribery. Despite their unsound economic condition both father and the son, however, paint a rich picture of themselves to impress Jalpa's parents for gaining matrimonial connection with their well-to-do family. Dayanath orders fine jewellery to the goldsmith and pays an advance of one thousand rupees and promises to pay the rest one thousand rupees within a week. They spend a lot of money in the pomp and show in the marriage. But all this is meaningless for Jalpa because

in her jewellery there is the deficiency of that item, the necklace (*chandrahar*) which she has craved for seven long years. Her hurt sentiments are flamed when the women who come to attend the marriage also point out the deficiency.

The dilemma of Dayanath and Ramanath is different. They cannot disentangle themselves from the web of problems they have landed into. The goldsmith who now insists for money demands return of the jewellery if the money cannot be paid. While Jalpa burns within for not getting necklace, her husband and the father-in-law find an easy solution to their problem. They conspire to steal Jalpa's ornaments and get rid of the debts. Ramanath lures her to deep sleep with the help of narcotics and does away with the casket of ornaments. Yet they cannot free from the debt since the goldsmith wants his money too. They still owe fifty rupees to the goldsmith.

Ramanath, then succeeds to get a job of fifty rupees in the municipal office. He has some extra income too on this job. By virtue of his job he is acquainted with the jewellers of the town. He now contemplates to buy some ornaments on credit and asks his wife for advice. Jalpa, who is although dying for the ornaments cannot, however, approve of any credit. "No, you need not borrow for my sake," she says, "...Even if I have to live without ornaments all through life I shall not ask you to borrow." Quite fervently she looks for the day when her husband would have enough money to buy her ornaments. Ramanath knows too well the unmitigated love of Jalpa for the necklace and fears that he would ultimately fall from her esteem if he does not buy it. He goes next day to the jeweller and purchases the ornaments in two hundred and fifty rupees. Jalpa is thrilled to see the necklace ; her dream of childhood is fulfilled. "Now I will not ask you whole year to get me anything. I shall be relieved only when the money is repaid." Seeing Jalpa's ornaments, her mother-in-law Rameswari too is tempted to possess jewellery. Ramanath again buys some jewellery worth of seven hundred rupees. Once attuned he cannot desist from the habit of borrowings. He finds pleasure in pleasing Jalpa. It becomes rather his obsession. Jalpa who knows the ills of borrowing cannot yet overcome the pleasure of owning ornaments which enable her to get social prestige. Ramanath now buys a saree and a watch sinking yet in further debt.

Jalpa's friend, Ratan is fascinated by Jalpa's bangles. She gives six hundred rupees to Ramanath to get her similar pair of bangles. Ramanath goes to the jeweller Gangu and orders for a new pair of bangles. Gangu

settles the six hundred rupees in the outstanding account and insists for the remaining two hundred and fifty rupees. He knows Ramanath has taken eight months to pay six hundred and will dodge him for the new credit indefinitely. Though he makes as per his promise the pair of bangles he refuses to hand them over until his outstanding account is cleared. Ramanath is in a fix because Ratan has been in the meanwhile pestering for the bangles. He speculates on some means to get money so as to pull himself out of the muddle. One day he gets the opportunity and snaps it at once. He lingers in with the day's collection of eight hundred rupees till the cashier has left. He brings the money home under the pretext that he would deposit it next day. He keeps the bag in the almirah and goes for a walk. Ratan who has been impatient for the bangles, fearing that the money has been spent away by Ramanath visits his house and demands the money from Jalpa. In a fit of anger Jalpa hands over the bag to her. When Ramanath returns home he is bewildered at Jalpa's act. His efforts to get back the money from Ratan do not succeed. Ratan returns his part of two hundred rupees and retains the rest with her. Ramanath is confounded as to how to explain all this in the office. Next day he must deposit the money in the treasury or go to jail for embezzlement. He writes a letter to Jalpa narrating the true state of affairs and leaves the home. He has no courage to face her and choosing to leave the home for good he boards a train for Calcutta.

He meets in the train an old man Devideen who is kind enough to help him with ticket fare to Calcutta. Ramanath informs the old man that he has no place to live in Calcutta. Devideen generously asks him to stay with him. "There are two rooms and a verandah in front. There is a room over it. I can get ten thousand if I sell it today. I will give you this room... It is fifty years ago when I ran away from home to Calcutta and since then I have seen both good and bad days."

Jalpa sells her necklace soon as she learns the facts from Ramanath's letter and deposits the money in the treasury. She goes about everywhere in search of her husband but without avail. She issues an advertisement in an Allahabad daily urging Ramanath to return home. She also announces an award of five hundred rupees to whosoever would provide information about him. Ramanath comes across this advertisement. But the guilt of embezzlement still haunts him. That there is no charge of embezzlement he takes it to be some trick of the police to trap him. He decides not to return home until he has at least five thousand rupees in his hands.

The old couple Devideen and his wife develop fond love for Ramanath. Here he is also fully protected from the police. Devideen is an ardent follower of Swarajya (independence) movement. He has sacrificed his two sons and his entire life in the movement. He has ultimately vowed to his wife not to indulge any more in these activities. He gives a very critical analysis of the state of affairs after the achievement of Swarajya. "Now tell me frankly", he says "when you talk about Swarajya what image of it comes before your vision? You will also make big demands and live in bungalows like the English men...You want to eat five times a day that too rich viands while the poor peasants will not get even dry grams one time... Do you ever think about that ? Now when you are a slave you die over luxuries, you will make the poor men your food when you get freedom."

One day Ramanath comes across a chess puzzle published in "Praja Mitra". He solves it and sends to the paper. Already he has been a skilled chess player in Allahabad, and remembers faintly to have solved the puzzle somewhere before. He earns fifty rupees in the solution. In fact the puzzle has been published by none but Jalpa to find out her husband on the suggestion of Ratan. They knew that none but Ramanath could solve it. With the money Ramanath opens a tea stall which he runs in the night for fear of police. The stall does well and Ramanath earns some four rupees within few hours in the night. One night he decides to see a drama at Manorama Theatre. While on his way to the theatre the police nab him for his suspicious looks and conduct him to the police station. Ramanath confesses his supposed crime. The police demands fifty guineas which obviously Ramanath cannot pay. He is put in the lockup even though it is found out that the money that he owed to the octroi office has been deposited by his wife and that there is no charge against him for embezzlement. The police let him believe that he is an accused in the embezzlement case and assure him to be freed and rewarded, if he stands an approver in a false case in which some nationalists are to be tried.

Jalpa finds out through the money receipt for the chess puzzle that Ramanath is in Calcutta. This is also confirmed by Ramesh, an official of the municipal office. The Calcutta police had made enquiries about the embezzlement and informed him that Ramanath was in their custody. Jalpa reaches Calcutta and gets the trace of Ramanath's address from one office of "Praja Mitra". She is hurt to learn that Ramanath is standing approver in the false case. She tries to persuade the husband through a letter to speak truth in

the court. Ramanath has been in the meanwhile dreaming to become a police inspector since the police has assured him of this post after the winning of the case. He lives luxuriously in the police custody with rich food, rich clothes and plenty of money to spend. He not only takes to drinking but falls in a passionate love with a prostitute, Zohra whom the police have provided for his entertainment. He vacillates after Jalpa's persuasion between the two choices of police torture and the prosperous future. In the situation he finds the second course easier and opts for that. The police win through his crammed statements in the court and the punishment is announced to the nationalists among whom five get ten-years jail, and eight a term of five years. Dinesh their leader is sentenced to be hanged. The people know the case is false and the punishment unjust. Jalpa herself feels guilty because her husband is a party to police intrigue and to do penance she goes to serve Dinesh's family. Dinesh is a teacher with two children, wife and the aged mother to look after. His family is ruined. Jalpa serves the family in every way she can and raises donation for their maintenance. Ramanath learns all about it from Zohra whom he has sent to find out about Jalpa. In the meanwhile Zohra having witnessed the selfless sacrifice of Jalpa is herself moved deeply. She has also fallen in love with Ramanath and is prepared to help him in any way she can.

Jalpa's sacrifice brings a sea-change in the mind of Ramanath. He has braced all odds only to please her and to rise in her esteem as a devoted husband. Not that Jalpa herself spurns his opulent future, he too decides to discard it. He gathers up strength to confess the truth. The case is yet to be tried in the high court. The judge who has sentenced Dinesh and his followers is an Indian and is known for his impartiality. Ramanath goes and apprises him of the true facts behind the case. The case is reopened and the nationalists are acquitted honourably. Ramanath is now tried for deceiving the police for promoting his interests. His lawyer proves in the court that he was forced to stand witness in the false case under threats and coercion. It is police who have deceived him by misinforming him about his embezzlement crime. The judge acquits Ramanath too. The novel comes to an abrupt end with Ramanath's settling on farming near Allahabad where Devideen and Zohra also follow him. Ratan, who has been a generous friend of Jalpa in her bad days dies in sick bed deceived by her brother-in-law's son, Manibhushan after the death of her husband. In the end Zohra too dies while trying to rescue some drowning people in the Ganga.

Premchand was a wonderful improvisator of plot. With singular success he merged the events of one locale with another. The family story of Allahabad is dexterously weilded into the story of national resurgence in Calcutta. Premchand was aware that more effective results could have been wrought if it was centred at one place giving larger treatment to the family story. In doing so it was not possible to demonstrate the salubrious transformation of Jalpa which is an important leit motif of the novel. It could be attained by placing her in a distant separation from the husband. Also, he couldn't have been otherwise able to depict the ideals of his heroine which she displays in Calcutta scene. The author, therefore, judiciously extended the scope of the novel in integrating the two stories. The novelty of the author's technical capability lies in that the two stories emerge not in gaping difference but as a single whole. As has been already said that the novel was written on a longer span of time. This has some bearing in the structure of the work as far as the end is concerned. The author seems to have realised that the novel was dragging on persistently and, therefore, he chose to close it in one chapter narrating the end of each character in almost abrupt manner. This has lent a jerky effect in the end. It is also uncharacteristic of the novelist's fiction craft.

Premchand has given a more fluid and detailed treatment to the characters of middle class urban life in *Ghaban* than his earlier novels like *Sewa Sadan* or *Nirmala*. He was ever keen to delineate life in the fullness. All this keenness is perceptible in the characters like Jalpa, Ratan, Ramanath, Dayanath, Devideen and Zohra and the situations they are exposed. Jalpa is the heroine of the novel and embodies in its entirety the traits of middle class Indian women. Her love of fine clothes, fine jewellery, and the comforts of life subordinates all other things in life but surely she does not wish to possess them at the cost of her husband. Even though she is conscious of her husband's helplessness she would not expose it to her mother and, therefore, proudly maintains her dignity in refusing to accept the mother's necklace so dear to her. "I won't accept anyone's alms", she says. Her fault lies in concealing her lust of jewellery from the husband and this is because the husband in his sham folly has given an exaggerated account of himself. Once she discovers the misery of her husband she spares no pain to set the things right. The dishonour and sufferances she undergoes on account of her husband's supposed embezzlement purges her immensely and her love for the husband finds sublimation in the love of the country. Already she has suffered one stigma of the husband and would not suffer another if the

husband's statement is responsible for the innocent nationalists to be condemned to prison or the gallows. She moulds the mind of Ramanath by her sacrifices and it is at this stage she loves him truly and exults in delight. "Her heart was never so stirred with love in the two and half year of their nuptial life." Yet then Jalpa is more fortunate than other heroines of Premchand. She enjoys the love of her devoted husband who is prepared to sacrifice all in order to please her.

Ramanath then appears as a foil to Jalpa. He has no ideals, no seriousness of purpose in life. His sole concern is to please the wife and to that extent is absurdly hen-pecked. He acts in a ludicrous manner in the police custody. He is far below the lofty edifice in which Premchand located his heroes in other novels. But even if he is a vulnerable mediocre, and a self-minded youth of no noble aims he never suffers a villain's hatred from his readers till the last phase of the novel. It is here that he suddenly falls from all grace only to redeem it in the end. One cannot help wondering if Premchand, while drawing the character of Ramanath, was thinking about Hansraj Vohra who turned an approver in Bhagat Singh's trial. Devideen is a pathetically self-assured realistic character who with his native vigour and courage supports not only Ramanath but also Jalpa. He snubs Ramanath for turning approver, "If any one asked to stand an approver I would have bluntly refused even if he were to pay me a lakh of rupees." Devideen's comment about the horrid conditions of the workers and the exploitation of the mill owners are some of the memorable passages in the novel. Premchand's emphasis on psychological analysis of Jalpa's character has been a controversial issue among Hindi critics. The author has purposefully placed her in extreme idiosyncratic situation where she even blesses her husband which is contrary to the customs of Hindu women. In fact Premchand's treatment of neuritis and detachment in presentation of social fact has yet to become acceptable to the critics who cannot view with tolerance the contradictions in human nature.

Jagaran : National Spokesman of the Poor

Premchand was back to Lamahi in May 1932 after about five years' stay in Lucknow. He had completed the Urdu version of *Pratigya (Bewa)* for which he had prolonged his stay in Lucknow for few days. His next Hindi novel *Karmabhoomi* (The Land of Action) was also complete. Next month he wrote to Nigam, "My new novel *Karmabhoomi* is under print. Eighteen forms have been printed. The book would be of some six hundred pages."

During the summer of 1932 Premchand lived in the village (Lamahi). He had immesurable love for the life in village and its simple, rustic and sturdy folks who spoke unpretentiously and showed great warmth for him. From them he drew the real life stuff of his novels. Most of his characters are based on the real people in the village. Of his immortal hero, Surdas, he said there was a blind beggar in the village who provided him the model of the character. Premchand depicted them in their generic aspects with the animus of their manner and speech he observed from close quarters. He would leave the village early morning every day in his usual unkempt clothes for the town. In the press he would sink in the proofs till evening and would walk to Companybagh crossing to hire a horse cart for Cantonment from where again he would hire another for Lamahi. Later on he hired a house in Beniabagh in Varanasi. His eldest son Shripatrai had taken admission in class intermediate of Queen College. It became his daily routine now to take morning walk. There was a park adjoining the house where during his walk the famous writers like Gahmari and Jaya Shankar Prasad would also join him. Premchand's spontaneous laughter would boom over the park, making his gay presence felt to others. Jaya Shankar Prasad then was at the height of his fame and creativity as a poet. It was a happy co-incidence that the two top authors of the time lived in the same town and exchanged their views on literature, politics and society. Though Jaya Shankar Prasad belonged to an austere Sanskrit tradition against Premchand's Persian background, the two

authors had deep regard for and affinity with each other. Premchand liked Prasad's works and expressed his reaction sharply when Prasad's novel *Kankal* was condemned by critics.

Hans was by now about two and a half year old. National movement was again catching momentum. Premchand was looking for some different forum than *Hans* to communicate with quicker frequency than the monthly journal. His friend and admirer Jainendra also proposed to launch a weekly journal. At this time a defunct fortnightly journal *Jagaran* (Awakening) run by Vinod Shankar Vyas came handy to Premchand. Vyas had brought out some twelve issues and was incurring loss. He wanted to close down the paper. Premchand took over the journal and converted into a weekly. Already he was incurring loss in *Hans* which was being fed by the earning from his books. His accumulated loss in the press and the monthly ran into thousands. And yet as he said, he could not 'resist the temptation of the weekly'. He was aware that *Jagaran* would be no less troublesome venture financially and wrote about to Jainendra. "This would also cause me a loss of thousands. But what to do, life itself is a big loss."

Premchand brought out the first issue of the new *Jagaran* on 22 August 1932 in which he set socialistic ideals as his policy. Announcing in the paper about his policy, he said, "... it will be fearless but not stubborn. It would be truthful and won't budge an inch from the truth. It shall keep off from partiality... The weaker and the unhappy section of the society will always find it pleading for them."

In the meanwhile *Hans* was asked to deposit security by the government. Premchand had planned a special number of the journal. Already he had to pool resources for the weekly. With much difficulty he deposited the security and brought out the issue finally by November.

As it fought against casteism and econo-social differences of the people, *Jagaran* also supplied a comprehensive information about the political happenings of the time. With insight and indepth detail Premchand commented upon Congress activities and gave a rousing support to Gandhiji. On 20 September 1932 Gandhiji began his historic fast in Yarovada jail. A day before Premchand wrote in the weekly in his article entitled *Mahan Tap*, "Tomorrow shall begin that great *tapa* (sacrifice) whose thought itself stires up deep. There have been many great *tapasyas* in the land of Bharat earlier too... but to oblate one's life for the sake of the country is Mahatma Gandhi's own greatness... Once Dadhichi had also sacrificed his life for the sake of the

country which we had taken for a legend because of our own lack of devotion. But today you (Gandhiji) have re-enlivened that great glory, that ancient ideal and that self-sacrifice of yore.”

The wrath of the government which had inflicted frequently on *Hans* fell on *Jagaran* too. For the story *Uska Ant* (His End) published in the weekly the government demanded a security in October 1932. Premchand had to rush to the Chief Secretary and explain the plot and theme of the story. He had also to give testimony of his ‘loyalty’. The weekly was at that time sustaining a loss of four hundred rupees every month. It had, however, reached a circulation of two thousand which marked a significant popularity since it was hardly subscribed by two hundred readers when published by Vyas a few months ago. Premchand also urged Nigam to help him with advertisements from the firms in Kanpur through his influence. “Even if only twenty-five rupees worth advertisements are received it will be possible to reduce losses and the weekly can be tolerably published”, he said.

Karmabhoomi

It was against the politico-economic backdrop of the foregoing that Premchand wrote his next novel *Karmabhoomi*. In the novel the fire of political awakening and the motivation to act emanate from an individual and the family and extending over the repulsive social strata flares up speedily to the world of the towns and the villages. In a taut well-knit plot it chronicles the urban poverty and the rural misery on account of depression. Premchand had studied the universal depression of 1929-30 and its worse phenomenal impact on Indian life particularly the poor masses. It is the first novel in which the older generation shakes off all its values and interests and follows the lead of the new generation in the national work. It is also the first novel in his canon in which the author has depicted the successful fight against the casteism and the setting up of inter-communal harmony in which both the old and the new generation become equal consorts.

The novel was supposedly begun on 16 April 1931. It was published in Premchand's own press in August 1932, Its Urdu version was published under the title of *Maidan-e-Amal* by Jamia Milia, Delhi. Premchand had been by now a bit interested to see the opinions of readers and the critics for his works to make presumably an assessment about himself. Next year in January he wrote to Jainendra, "The review of the *Karmabhoomi* must appear soon."

The story of *Karmabhoomi* is constructed on a capacious scale like some of Premchand's earlier novels. Lala Samarkanth is an industrious entrepreneur and has amassed huge wealth beginning his life in rags. He has a son Amarkant, a haggard and melancholy looking youth of dark complexion but a brilliant student with original ideas. He has national aspirations and shows scant interest in the father's business. His mother died in his childhood. His stepmother mistreats him. But his step sister Naina has a fond affection for the brother. If Amarkant loves anyone in the house it is Naina. In the meanwhile the stepmother dies in child-labour and to look after the family Lala Samarkanth gets his son married to the only daughter (Sukhada) of a

rich widow called Renuka Devi. After the marriage differences develop between father and the son for the latter's open disregard to run the family business. Amarkant, however finds mother's affection from his mother-in-law Renuka Devi from whom he cannot help accepting some money for pocket expenses though he abhors to accept any money from the father. He joins the local Congress and participates in public speeches. This offends the local administration who warn the father for severe consequences. Sukhada now gives birth to a son. She urges the husband to make his own earning so that they don't have to live any longer as a parasite in the family. Amarkant somehow sits in the shop and runs the business. But he cannot do any malpractice and refuses one day to accept a pair of stolen bangles at a throw away price from Kaley Khan.

During one of these days Amarkant meets Sakina, the grand-daughter of a widow, Pathanin who lives on a five-rupee monthly allowance paid regularly by Lala Samarkanth. Sakina is extremely beautiful. Amarkant is wildly charmed by her simplicity and innocence as well as her beauty. One day two British soldiers visit his shop with a girl. All the three are dead drunk. When they leave the shop after transaction a beggar woman attacks the two soldiers with her knife and kills them. She then does not harm any one. She throws the knife and pleads for punishment. This woman is Munni who was raped some six months ago by the two white soldiers. The people who hear her woeful tale are moved with pity and help her for acquittal. Amarkant too raises donations to get her freed in the murder case. Even the poor old lady Pathanin is ardent to give her donation of two rupees which she has saved by selling Kerchiefs. The people hail her after the acquittal but she refuses to go to her husband. She fears that after the dishonour she has fallen from the grace of her husband forever. He may accept her for the time being out of sympathy but it cannot last long. She also resists the temptation to see her son. The husband who is a farmer makes all attempts for her return and finally dies in frustration. Munni goes to Hardwar where she lives in a village among the untouchables after her suicide bid has failed. She has a happy life among the untouchables.

Amarkant's development with Sakina in the meantime takes deeper turn. He has frantically fallen in love with her. After his friend Salim refuses to marry her, he cannot bear to see someone else marrying her. Her marriage has been already settled and is to take place in a week's time. Amarkant in his feverish passion remonstrates against the marriage. "So long as I am alive,"

he says “I will not allow this marriage to take place. I tell you Salim I will give my life on her door...” Sakina too feels impulsively that she cannot live without Amarkant. She seems to aver that she is an emotional consort for him. She refuses to marry the groom her grandmother has selected and consequently the settled marriage is called off.

To impart free education to the poor children Dr. Shanti Kumar opens a “Sewashram” (centre for social service). Amarkant who teaches the children at the *ashram* gets elected to the municipal board. It, however, does not please the father since till now the son has not earned any penny for him. On his father’s retort that he is droning on his money Amarkant leaves the home. He hires a house at a monthly rent of ten rupees where Sukhada also accompanies him to live. He makes some living by selling khadi clothes. Sukhada takes up a job of teacher on monthly salary of fifty rupees. One day he visits Sakina and opens his love to her. “Let us go away from here,” he says, “and live in a hut far from this selfish world where we can live together on toil. I will have no other longing once you are with me.” Pathanin who happens to return home at that moment and overhears the conversation and gets furious at the event and turns away Amarkant. His father too comes to know about it and persuades the son to give up the thought of marrying Sakina. He refuses to accept her as his daughter -in-law. The scandal is rumoured while Amarkant deserts his home to settle in a village in Hardwar. He teaches the children of the untouchables and is very much adored by the village folks. In this village lives Munni for whose rescue he has once raised donation. The village folks, Gudar, Kashi, and Saloni lend him substantial warmth and affection and he finds life meaningfully comfortable among them.

Back in Varanasi trouble shoots up when the untouchables try to seek entry into a temple to offer prayers. The pioneer of the caste devotees refuses the entry and shuns them from attending the religious discourse. Dr. Shanti Kumar then gives himself discourses in an open ground assembly. This is largely attended by the untouchables and even Salim takes interest in its success. Dr. Shanti Kumar exhorts the untouchables to demand entry into the temple. This is fiercely opposed by the orthodox devotees and in the melee Dr. Shanti Kumar is seriously hurt. Sukhada now takes over the front after Dr. Shanti Kumar is admitted in the hospital. She is hailed as the leader of the masses.

The branches of Sewashram are opened in all the localities of the town.

The workers under the leadership of Sukhada begin to picket the shops that sell narcotic drugs. A plan is now mooted to construct houses for the poor. Sukhada and Dr. Shanti Kumar propose to construct some three thousand houses for the poor for which they make efforts to get land from the municipal corporation. Their attempt is, however, frustrated by Lala Dhaniram whose son in the meanwhile has married Naina. To draw attention of the authorities Sukhada undertakes a general strike in the town. Her mother Renuka Devi too helps her in the mission. The strike is successful. Sukhada is arrested. She refuses to Lala Amarkant to be released on bail and goes to prison happily.

Salim qualifies in I.C.S. and is posted in the place where Amarkant works for the rural upliftment. As an I.C.S. Officer Salim imbibes the brutal behaviour in dealing with the farmers. Because of crop failure the peasants are in no position to pay the taxes. Farmers have earned no money in their crop. The prices have receded to some forty years ago. Amarkant pleads with the zamindar, Mahantji to condone the taxes for the year. He, however, ridiculously fails in his attempt and advises the peasants to refuse to pay the taxes. He is arrested on the charge of inciting the peasants and sent to jail. Incidentally it is Salim who has to arrest him against his will. Amarkant is later transferred to Lucknow jail where his wife Sukhada is serving her term.

With the son and daughter-in-law going to jail for selfless service to the people, Lala Samarkanth realizes the grossness of his private interests in preference to public duty. He decides to atone by public service the rest of his life following the path of his children. "Father acts as the guide to the sons", he says, "and the sons follow his ideal. But in my case I have to follow my sons." He visits Salim and appeals to him to be generous to the peasants. Salim prepares the report on the peasants' condition and recommends the taxes to be exempted. He, however, incurs government's displeasure and is relieved of his job. Salim joins the national movement. Even on provocation he remains non-violent. He too falls a prey to the government's suppression and sent to Lucknow jail. Now Sakina joins the movement. Her grandmother, Pathanin too is arrested. Public speeches and assemblies are banned. It seems no one can lead the masses. Suddenly people rush to listen to someone addressing forcefully from the pile of bricks. This is Lala Samarkanth who has taken over command after the leaders have been put behind the bars. In his fiery speech he makes demand from the municipal corporation to give the land to the people. When Lala Samarkanth is arrested Renuka Devi takes the

position and addresses the people. When she too is arrested Dr. Shanti Kumar holds the fort. In a frantic bid the police take Dr. Shanti Kumar into custody. A stream of leaders now emerge from among the people. This time it is the pleasant, alacritic girl of rich household, Naina. She is the sister of Amarkant and wife of Lala Maniram whose father has been responsible for the refusal of municipal land. She leads the twentyfive thousand people to the municipal office. She is, however, shot dead by her husband. Naina's death ushers in a cathartic change in the brutal atmosphere of the municipal board. It also transforms the inclement heart of even Lala Dhaniram. Ultimately the board decides unanimously to concede the demand of the people. In the end all those taken into custody are released. The government sets up a committee of five members which would work for the common welfare of the people. Amarkant and Salim are made the members of the committee. They are given powers to nominate three more members. Who the other three would be ? One of them atleast would be none but Munni, as Amarkant informs her who is already full of tears.

All characters, belonging to various categories find fullest development in the novel. The novel is rather a story of transformation. All characters undergo a change in Gandian process. No one is asked to change the course of life on compulsion and yet everyone does it to join the national movement. Though Sukhada is essentially the heroine of the novel other women characters like Maina, Munni, Sakina and Renuka Devi, all rise themselves to her height and make sacrifices and in this pace even Pathanin and Saloni do not lag behind. "In the field you have won the lead over us", says Amarkant to the women participants in the movement "we stand where we stood before...I beg forgiveness of all sisters and mothers." Sukhada's differences with the husband in the early phase of life are quite natural. But once she transforms she moulds the entire environment with her. Her willing renunciation of rich comforts and accompanying her husband to live in poor conditions are unprecedented steps in the hierarchy of heroines earlier novels. She displays a unique blend of idealism and practical sense of life. To keep going the family without the help of her mother or the father-in-law which her husband does not approve, she instantly secures a job of a teacher. She endures calmly the infatuated weakness of her husband for Sakina.. She also suffers with fortitude the alienation of the husband. She takes no time to decide when all attempts fail to secure municipal land for constructing houses for the poor that a general strike is the only solution to focus attention of the

authorities. And it is through this that they achieve their results even if they have to pay heavy price of Naina's life for it. Munni is a unique character in the novel. She cannot wait for any law to punish the criminals who have ruined her life. She takes revenge and boldly admits the crime. Munni's story, however, does not have much bearing in the structure of the novel. The author has three aims to solve in her incorporation; a sense of unity is generated among the people for the first time through her pathetic story and this unity is essential in the future course of action in the development of the novel, the atrocity of the ruling class is depicted in her ruin and finally her presence in the hills finds some connection and development in Amarkant's character when he visits the hill village. Naina dies a martyr and it is through her sacrifice that the struggle moves to a happier conclusion; the land is given to the poor, a committee is proposed to see people's welfare and Lala Dhaniram undergoes a transformation and joins the national movement. Sakina plays no major role in the novel except being the object of Amarkant's infatuation. But she too joins the national movement. The author's purpose of portraying her is to create a multi-communal galaxy of characters who are part and parcel of the mainstream of Indian life. In Renuka Devi we find another unprecedented character who identifies the national cause with the cause of her family and places all her wealth at the disposal of Shukada and national workers. She makes no show of this sacrifice and differs from queen Janhvi in being of practical help that achieves results in the action(karma).

Amarkant falls in the eyes of the readers in his unpardonable infatuation for Sakina. His is a romantic love in its spell and he forgets his primary duty towards wife and the child. Shukada knows his weakness that he has a greater love to be a leader than to serve the people. For this sake he does not hesitate to trap Atmanand or to deceive the people with the concocted story of his success in the negotiations. But his virtues and sacrifices outweigh the demerits. He not only renounces his father's home of rich life to set an example before others, he gives a momentum to the Sewashram founded by Dr. Shanti Kumar. He has no hesitation to sell khadi for which he has to toil immensely just for a rupee or two. He brings awakening for the national movement both in Varanasi and Hardwar village. It is in him the story of national movement of the town and rural world is joined. He resists the government violence with restraint and does not allow the bloodshed to take place by the movement workers. Under the impact of his personality even

Kaley Khan, a life long thief and convict transforms and does not react violently for which he has to pay the price of his life. Like Sukhada, Dr. Shanti Kumar combines his idealism with realism. In fact all characters draw strength from him. His comment on the foreign system of education is a fine commentary of the author himself who had a twenty years experience as a teacher and knew of its useless relevance to the country. The transformation of Salim and Lala Samarkanth are similar. Both have seen the pleasures of opulence and spurn it when they see others plunging in life-and-death struggle against the foreign rule for the sake of poor masses.

The structure of the novel is superbly poised. It unfolds ingenuously the reigning issue of foreign domination through a variety of dimensions in education, religion, justice and changing social process. It is the last but one complete novel by the author who had by now not only matured the craft of plot construction but had also reached the farthest point of its handling with facility and brilliance. In *Karmabhoomi* the unity of plot is never slack despite its splendid movement in time and space with a diverse variety of characters. Our objection to the novel may be lack of economy in the characters but not in their handling. The amalgamated effect of all this is the result of extraordinary sweep and range with which the novel portrays the ghastly exploitation of foreign rulers with their Indian accomplices and the ruthless sectarian attitude of casteism. Its happy note is that the people are ultimately united irrespective of their cast, creed and rank against the oppressive rule. The change cannot be wrought with reform and in this education plays a major role. Both Amarkant and Dr. Shanti Kumar work for the educational upliftment of the people and demand equality with the untouchables. It is in this novel that the issue of untouchability finds the largest and effective treatment. So it is in this novel that the author does not resort to suicides and unexpected deaths for the resolution of his problem. There is a natural evolution of the events and their culmination. All characters except Naina live to see the fruition of their dreams at the end. The author has demonstrated a masterly execution of his subject matter in which both the urban and rural population rise against the foreign tyranny and show that there is no dearth of leaders in the country. They prove that lock-up and torture cannot silence them. In this struggle men and women, rich and poor, peasants and tradesmen, bureaucrats and public men and the village and the town all take lead of action with crowning confidence and courage. And their sweeping action constitutes the excellence of the novel.

Karmabhoomi is one of the best novels of Premchand. It was widely acclaimed by the Hindi world and taken up by authors for translation in other languages. But some Hindi critics envied the fame and success of the author. They waged an organised battle not only to belittle *Karmabhoomi* but other works too. Among them were Shivnath Singh, Jyotiprasad Mishra 'Nirmal' and Kishan Singh. The last of these critics preposterously attacked the author for using the political backdrop in the novel. Premchand wrote about it to Maniklal Joshi in his letter of 20 December 1933 in which he gave a convincing reply. No work could be second-rate just because it is constructed against a political backdrop as Kishan Singh tried vainly his readers to believe.

Financially Premchand was still passing through hard days. He was sustaining regular losses both in *Hans* and *Jagaran*. On 18 August 1933 he wrote to Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, *Jagaran* has become unbearable. I am confounded how to get over this situation. I am incurring a loss of about Rs. 200. After all how long can it go on like this." In January next year he informed that his loss on account of the paper during 1933 had accumulated to Rs. 2000. To make it self-supporting he thought *Jagaran* could be converted into a daily. He also made a plan to publish it from Lucknow. It, however, did not materialise. In addition to *Jagaran* his press too was eating away his hard earned income from the books. The creditors were persisting for repayment. Premchand wrote with a heavy heart to Jainendra on 14 February 1934, "The root cause of all problems is this press... A labour of eleven years over and above ten thousand rupees besides all sufferances have all gone in vain. Because of this press, I was misunderstood by my friends ; many turned hostile to me and the valuable time which I should have utilised in reading and writing I wasted away in reading proofs. This is the biggest mistake in my life."

A little relief came at the time when *Sewa Sadan*, his first Hindi novel published some fifteen years ago was signed to be filmed by the Mahalaxmi Cinetone of Bombay. Premchand was paid seven hundred and fifty rupees for the story. The film was directed by Nanubhai Vakil. It was titled on the Urdu version of novel *Bazar-e-Husn*. It, however, did not impress Premchand. In a telegraphic message he said, "*Sewa Sadan* released. Saw. Fair but not satisfactory." According to Amritrai the Tamil version of *Sewa Sadan* was well produced which was directed by R. Subramanyam. The famous singer M. Subhalaxmi had played the role of Suman.

In April 1934, Premchand attended the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Hindi Literary Congress) session in Delhi where he was greatly welcomed by the new writers. He, however, did not appreciate certain things in the conference and wrote about it satirically in *Jagaran*. He was at the time toying with an idea to form Hindustani Sabha to promote a kind of Hindi that could welcome words from all languages in the country, even English. He did not appreciate the Sanskritised Hindi of Hindu priests. Time has proved the judicious foresight of Premchand. There are no two opinions today that if Hindi has to be made largely acceptable it has to be a simple Hindustani which will accommodate familiar words from other languages and will have to do away with the tendency of Sanskrit derivation. From Delhi Premchand visited Aligarh where he was happy to see the people had read his works. In fact even though he was now writing in Hindi and was considered the monarch of Hindi fiction, the Urdu writers still considered him to be a Urdu writer. In Aligarh too he was accorded a rousing welcome. He prepared the draft scheme of Hindustani Sabha. in Aligarh. He also favoured an idea of forming a Writers' Association. He was already thinking about a translator's organisation. He discussed all these at length in Aligarh. With a warm farewell of Urdu writers in Aligarh he went home to resume the work of *Hans* and *Jagaran*. He was now writing his greatest novel *Godan*.

Mention must be made of Premchand's last play *Prem Ki Vedi* (The Altar of Love) which was published in 1934. The play didn't sell well because the readers of Premchand were more impressed by his novels and short stories than his plays. Even today few Hindi readers read plays and Premchand wrote plays for reading and not for stage. There is no wonder that hardly a dozen copies were sold during the six months after its publication.

The story of the play depicts the religious and cultural obstacles that intercept the bond of true love. The heroine of the play Jenny Gardner is a girl of fine tastes and vigorous spirit. She is intelligent and can see things in critical perspectives which of course only lead to her own detriment. Her father has died some three years ago. Her mother, Mrs. Gardner wishes her to marry William the son of a railway guard. Jenny refuses to marry William who is not only of cold spirit but also devoid of the traits which she would like to see in the youth of her choice. She is, however, drawn towards Yograj, the husband of her friend, Uma. Yograj is gentle, kind and of intelligent ideas. After the death of Uma she lends consolation to Yograj who in the meanwhile falls in love with her and also proposes her. Jenny pricked now by

her conscience has a different thought. In her reasoning the marriage of an orthodox Hindu with a Christian would land up in troubles and she does not wish to hurt Yograj on her account. With such conviction in mind she returns to her mother's house after spending some months with Yograj. Here she discovers that her mother herself has married William. She finds subsequently difficult to live in the house and vacillates if she should go back to Yograj who in the meanwhile has died in a turbulent state of mind in utter frustration after his wife's death and her own rejection of his proposal. She holds herself delinquent for his death. She realises that she should have been more human than rational and condemns vehemently the sectarian values of the religion that separate man from man.

The play is dominated by the heroine who is the very spokesman of the playwright. Premchand wished to see man rise above the pale of religion and community and sought to enunciate in this play how man's subordination to such things lead to his ultimate ruin.

XII

Disillusionment; with Films

Premchand willingly responded to all media for expression. Paradoxically it was not the case with films though he made a stint in this line too. Even as he thought film as a wonderful media he was quite aware that the two arts of literature and the audiovisual differed a great deal. He never substituted one for the other.

The primary purpose of his working for the films was money. One need not, therefore, be pessimistic about his drift to the films when he was in the pinnacle of literary activity. The Ajanta Cinetone of Bombay offered him to work for them on an annual contract of Rs. 8000 which he had to accept because the literary fame would not help him to tide over his financial crisis. He had to run the two journals, pay to the workers, repay the debts to the money-lenders, maintain the machinery of the press and look after himself and the family. His friends including Jaya Shankar Prasad did not approve of his going to films. His wife, Shivrani Devi too did not favour it. Premchand saw through the pros and cons and accepted the offer finally as the tortuous need of earning money had become inevitable.

He reached Bombay on 1 June, 1934. He informed Jainendra on 15 June that he had rented a house and was taking meals in a Dadar hotel. Next month he went to Varanasi to fetch his wife and the daughter, Kamala who was then with her. The sons, Shripatrai and Amritrai were studying in Allahabad. He does not seem to have liked the new career from the very beginning and indicated in his letters to have a rethinking after a year. Within three months he found it difficult to write for the films because there were no actors to suit his characters.

His immediate assignment was to write for the film *Mazdoor*. The story of the film was already determined by the producer and the director. Premchand was required only to add skin and flesh to it. He also polished and wrote the dialogues which were very effective. The film depicted how much an ideal industrialist can do good to the people and the country. Premchand also acted in a short sequence in the role of a “sarpanch”. However, the film was not as

revolutionary as it looked out to be. Still it was banned by the Bombay censor board. It was released in Lahore where some sixty thousand workers are said to have mobbed the cinema hall to see the film and military had to be called in to control them. It was exhibited there for about seven days when the Punjab government banned its show. It was released later in Delhi and Central Provinces where again it was banned by the government.

Premchand seems to have had a mixed reaction again to the films at the outset. For some time he considered it worthwhile in so far as it enabled him to make some money. He even advised Nigam to write some scenarios. In a letter of 11 August 1934 he wrote to him, "If you write a scenario for screen... I may arrange its acceptance in some film company... Please come over here.... Let us go around and talk about it to some film companies...If you sign a contract for even two stories a year, you may earn from there (Kanpur) up to fifteen hundred rupees and to write two stories is a job of two months." He also advised Jainendra to write scenarios and asked for some good plots.

As ever Premchand worked on his job very seriously. He regularly went to the studio though he was not required to do so. The directors and the actors respected him. Gradually he discovered the cultural bankruptcy of the film producers who cared for nothing but the money and expected Premchand to write in a mechanical process. Premchand was upset in the way the film makers were introducing vulgarity in the name of entertainment. In addition to these professional problems the film-involvement was making big demand on his literary writing. He was soon convinced that film was no place for a literary person. He wrote about it exhortatively to Dr. Indranath Madan. Even when he was in the teeth of financial crisis and paucity of time on account of *Hans*, *Jagaran* and the press he continued to write with endless vigour and spontaneity. The films he realised would consume all his energy and originality. He could bear it at no cost. In his letter to Dr. Indranath Madan on 26 December, 1934 about six months after he had joined the film industry, he wrote, "Film is no place for literary persons. I joined it because I thought this would provide me some economic independence. But this was my mistake. I am returning to literature again. In fact I never stopped literary writing which I consider the object of my life..."

In the meanwhile neither *Hans* nor *Jagaran* could become self-supporting. *Jagaran* was giving him loss of one hundred fifty rupees every month. The press was also in the doldrum. The advertisers did not keep their promise.

They even did not pay for the advertisements published in the weekly. On this account, Premchand wrote that some two hundred rupees had been sunk in *Jagaran*. He eventually suspended the paper for some time. Some people thought it had been closed. The misgiving was deepened by the article *Jagaran Ki Samadhi* (The End of Jagaran) which he wrote on its suspension. He later clarified that it was not the death of the journal. Before leaving for Bombay he had assigned the editing of the journal to Sampooranand who had carried on the policy of Premchand to his full satisfaction. At the time it was the only paper in Hindi that propagated socialism without fear of perpetual losses and government suppression. Writing to the editor of *Bharat* Premchand said, "The forceful propagation of socialism which *Jagaran* has done in the hands of Sampooranand is known very well to the Hindi world." All the same Premchand was equally worried about the fate of the workers who were employed on account of the paper and had to lose livelihood if the paper were closed. When he ultimately found it impossible to finance it he negotiated with the proprietors of the Leader Press, Allahabad and handed over the weekly to them under the editorship of Sampooranand. The transfer of the paper took place sometime in August 1934. It continued to be printed in Premchand's press in Varanasi.

Premchand did not like the film, *Mazdoor*. "Director", he said, "is all in all in the films. The writer may be the king of his pen but he is an ordinary subject in the director's empire." He worked for a subsequent film which had a romantic story. Premchand seems to have had a little role in it, His helplessness in the films was being increasingly affirmed and he was seriously thinking to leave it.

There is an interesting episode during this time. Premchand was staying in Dadar where the famous playwright, Harikrishna Premi was also lodged. He too went to Bombay to try his luck in films. On Premchand's enquiry as to what made him join films, Premi said he wanted to set up a press. Premchand was quaintly surprised at this. He had been himself the victim of this folly. He at once quipped, "Today you came to earn money from films to set up your press, tomorrow you would come again to deliver yourself from the debts of the press."

During this time Premchand got an offer to go to England where he was required to write five scenarios for a film company. An annual salary of Rs. 10,000 was offered to him after his return from England which would involve about a year. "I will not let you go," said Shivrani Devi. Having overworked

all this while she knew Premchand was not fit enough to undertake any strenuous work. It would impair his health further. She could not, therefore, bear separation for the whole year and Premchand had to ultimately yield to her insistence.

while in Bombay Premchand snatched some time in December 1934 to visit south India where his wife Shivrani Devi also accompanied him. He was invited to address the annual gathering of the Hindi Prachar Sabha (Hindi Propagation Conference). Premchand was very much impressed by the love and respect bestowed upon him by the people of South India. There was a packed audience to listen to him. "I was standing garlanded like a fool," he wrote in his usual simplicity. "For the first time I felt speechless. People said, "He is a great Hindi writer and waited for the pearls to flow from my mouth and here I was not able to decide what to say." Premchand was very much happy to see the growing love for Hindi in the south. The people who were not able to participate in the national movement were keen at least to foster unity by learning Hindi. He was equally perturbed that the north had not much cared for the rich languages of the south.

Premchand did some sightseeing in Madras and later visited Mysore and Bangalore and had a brief stay in Pune on way back to Bombay. Harikrishna Premi was also with him during the visit. Premchand noted the happy experiences in the south in his travelogue very sumptuously. On return from the south Premchand prepared to leave the films in order to settle on creative writing at Lamahi. His fear that he was wasting away his precious time in the studios had been fully affirmed. "I did not get any satisfaction from the films," he wrote to Jainendra finally in February 1935, "The directors also do not derive any satisfaction but they cannot help and are lingering over here out of compulsion...Idealism creeps in the plots I conceive and I am told there is no entertainment value in them." Before he left Bombay, he was offered to bring out a daily newspaper on a monthly salary of Rs. 700 with four assistants to help him. But having suffered in a bigger industry like films he could not visualise any job in Bombay that could allow him to do creative writing alongside. He could not expect congenial atmosphere in any profession in Bombay. "I do not want to live here at all," he replied to the proposal and set aside the offer. In fact he and his wife both were fed up with the mechanical and artificial life of Bombay.

The Ajanta Cinetone with which Premchand had been engaged was closing. There were still three months for the contract. He could have asked

for the remaining two thousand rupees due to be paid to him during the contract period. He, however, did not insist on for the contractual payment and bade farewell to Bombay and for that matter to the films on 4 April 1935. On way to Varanasi Premchand and his wife had a brief stay at Khandawa and Sagar. The famous patriotic Hindi poet Makhanlal Chaturvedi had requested Premchand to visit his home town, Khandawa. Khandawa is a land of orange cultivation with picturesque sights on the plains of the placid river Narmada. Premchand spent about a week in the delightful company of Chaturvedi and left for Sagar for a brief sojourn with his daughter while reaching Varanasi to immerse fully in *Hans* and other writings. *Godan* was still being written and had been immensely interrupted in Bombay. Informing about the progress of *Godan* he had earlier written to Jainendra, “The last pages of the novel *Godan* remain to be written...I feel like leaving this job and go to my place. There is no money over there, but there is satisfaction. Here I think, I am just wasting my life.”

XIII

Apogean Height : Godan

In Varanasi Premchand worked assiduously writing for *Hans* and other journals as well as to complete the novel *Godan*. He at once came out with his whole-hearted support when K.M. Munshi proposed about the formation of a national-literature board. He decided to bring out a special number of *Hans* featuring the best of writings not only in Hindi but other languages too including Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannad, Tamil, Telgu and Malayalam. He attached equal emphasis on each of the languages and strove to get the writings translated into Hindi. He brought out the special issue in October and had to visit Bombay once for this purpose. In the meanwhile he decided to shift *Hans* to Allahabad where he felt there was better literary atmosphere. He did not like the self-imposed greatness that the writers in Varanasi had begun to proclaim and was very unhappy about it. But then *Hans* was taking away a lot of time from his creative writing. K.M. Munshi and Jainendra advised him to hand over the journal to Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad so that he could be freed from all tensions and devote to literary writing peacefully. Already a year before he had the bitter experience when on provocation the workers of his press had gone on strike which had not only paralysed the functioning of the press for about a month but also had created a misunderstanding about him in the public eye. No one had realised that far from earning from the press he was spending his own earning on the press. Premchand, accordingly, handed over the paper to the Parishad and from October that year (1935) *Hans* was brought out by the Parishad in which Premchand and K.M. Munshi appeared as the co-editors.

As ever he was now immensely concerned about Hindu -Muslim unity and expressed his views with vigorous frankness on the unity and the use of Hindustani language from whatever platform he found. He was realistic and farsighted. He knew that both Sanskritised Hindi and Persianised Urdu were impossible proposition for the large masses of Indian population and

advocated ceaselessly the use of Hindustani with Persian or Devnagari script. This proposal had full approval of Mahatma Gandhi. The Hindustani Akademi was working for its acceptance and implementation. Premchand attended the national convention of the Akademi in Allahabad in January 1936. The convention was presided over by Dr. Sacchidananda Sinha, the editor of *Hindustan Review* and was attended by the veterans of the two languages (Hindi and Urdu) among whom were Maulvi Abdul Haq and Dr. Ganga Nath Jha. It, however, assumed a political overtone. The Hindi writers averred that the Congress was trying to please the Muslims through the Urdu oriented use of Hindustani. On the other hand the Muslims feared that by doing away the Persian vocabulary the Akademi would ultimately wipe out the Urdu from the country. A consideration of the literature produced during the quarter century after this period in the two languages would reveal how dangerous and retrograde this misunderstanding proved to the two literatures.

All the same Premchand was being invited to a multitude of conferences and conventions around the country where the people particularly the new writers were eagerly longing to see and listen to the greatest writer of the age. In February 1936 he attended the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan convention of Bihar Province in Purnia. Soon as he returned from Purnia he was invited in March to Delhi. There was a proposal to set up Hindustani Sabha for which Premchand was already working for years. It was Holi occasion when Premchand visited Delhi accompanied by Shivrani Devi. He inaugurated the Hindustani Sabha meet at Jamia Milia which was well attended. Premchand was quite satisfied over the function and wrote about manifesto in *Hans* next month. "It was perhaps the first occasion in Hindustan when on 8th March the scholars and litterateurs of Delhi both in Hindi and Urdu founded a Hindustani Sabha in Jamia Milia whose object would be to bring together the litterateurs of the two languages close, to generate love, sympathy and unity among the scholars of two languages, to create opportunity, to respect sentiments and thoughts of each other and to work for the development of Hindustani language.

Coming back from Delhi Premchand found an invitation waiting for him for the Progressive Writers' Conference being held in Lucknow. There were repeated requests to Premchand to preside over the conference, who, however, suggested the names of K.M. Munshi and Dr. Zakir Hussain. When this was not accepted Premchand consented to preside. He is said to have prepared a very long and moving speech in chaste Persian since he

anticipated most of the delegates to be Urdu writers. The anecdote goes that a big welcome to the author was planned at Lucknow railway station. There was a stirring emotion to see the top writer of the millions of Hindi and Urdu readers. The day Premchand was to arrive Sajjad Zahir and Rashida were preparing with host of others to receive him at the Station. They were non-plussed when at this very moment they found Premchand making enquiry about them reached their house and instead of showing any anger for the inconvenience he was apologising for not having been able to wire. With the change in railway schedule that very month the train arrived earlier than expected.

At the Conference Premchand enunciated very fundamental aspects of literature. He called upon the delegates to remember that language was a means and not an end. Literature today had a cardinal responsibility to discharge since unlike the past it was literature and not religion that controlled the bridle of the society. Here he also declared his utilitarian theory of literature. "I do not hesitate to say," he said, "that like other things I also measure the art on the balance of utility". He explained at length the true meaning and significance of art and beauty in literature. He made it plain that literature was no venue for money seekers ; it was the place for only those devotees whose sovereign object in life was to serve, who had love and pain in their hearts. Premchand's speech was well received at the Conference. It was a historic speech by any author in the country and was published in *Zamana*. It is pertinent to point out that in a recent meeting with the writers in Delhi in connection with Premchand's centenary celebrations the noted poet and novelist, Agyeya informed that Premchand's speech at the Conference was extempore and not written. For some reasons Premchand did not read the speech he had prepared.

After the Progressive Writers' Conference, Premchand went to Lahore to preside over the Arya Bhasa Sammelan organised by Arya Samaj. While highlighting the services of Arya Samaj by eliminating the evils of the society and educating the people about the forgotten rich treasure of Vedas he said the education which maintained the difference between the rich and the poor, which could not generate strength to face the difficulties in life and which could not foster the harmony of art and discipline was useless. He himself was once under Arya Samaj influence in Basti and had welcomed the constructive tenets of the Samaj. Here also he took opportunity to explain the need of Hindi-Urdu unity and urged the people to demolish the false barriers

that antagonised the two languages. “Both are same. There is least difference in speech. The only difference is in writing,” he said. He impressed that unity among the people was possible by bringing unity between the two languages. By all accounts Premchand was far ahead of his time in emphasising the need of national integration which has become the crucial need today in this country. “The distance between the souls is the main reason between two languages,” he said, “With our mutual goodwill we have to remove this distance,” he added.

He stayed in Lahore over ten days and propagated the tenets of Progressive Literature and the Hindustani Sabha at numerous conferences. He was not keeping well at this time. He developed severe fever and wished to return home. His admirers would not allow him to move in fever. He had virtually to flee Lahore as he could not afford to prolong his stay there. Premchand usually shirked from the travels and conferences on earlier occasions and avoided many pressing invitations. But this time his spirit seemed rapturously happy to attend the conferences—literary-religious-social whatsoever everywhere in the country and at each place people waited arduously to see and listen to him—he was the man of the nation. His ready acceptance of the invitations despite his ill health and pressures of writing is a pointer that presumably he had some intuition of his end.

Within a week after his return from Lahore Premchand had to attend the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad meeting in Nagpur. It was held on 24 April 1936. It was presided over by Gandhiji and was attended by eminent politicians and litterateurs of the time. Among them were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jamunalal Bajaj, C. Rajagopalachari, Maulana Abdul Haq, Jainendra Kumar, Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Shankar Rao Dev etc. The convention went on well but the issue in the end cropped up as to what should be the medium of the minutes of the convention. Gandhiji had visualised the problem ; and suggested ‘Hindi-Hindustani’. It was felt that the Urdu speaking delegates would take offence if it was merely Hindi and also the Hindi speaking delegates would feel slighted if it was Hindustani. In order to avoid any such misunderstanding the ‘Hindi-Hindustani’ was considered the best solution. Even so Abdul Haq protested and pleaded for Urdu to be medium of the minutes. Premchand later recalled that there were only three delegates in the convention representing Urdu and even when votes were sought the majority voted for ‘Hindi-Hindustani’. Premchand, however, personally felt that Hindustani would have

served the purpose best. The Urdu writers praised the bold suggestion of Premchand. In fact Premchand was claimed at the time and much earlier both by Hindi and Urdu writers with equal gusto as a great writer in each language. Banarasidas Chaturvedi has quoted an eminent Urdu scholar claiming “Premchand has become a classic in Urdu. He is ours.”

In June 1936 his greatest work *Godan* was released. The novel was published in his own press. In his letter to Jainendra on 22 June he wrote, “I am sending *Godan* today. If you like it you may review it in *Arjun* or *Vishal Bharat* or *Hans*. Write to me if you haven’t liked it and in that case you need not review it.”

Godan is the greatest novel of our age. If one were to have complete information of rural India’s poverty in the mid-forties and even after one would best be guided by the pages of this masterpiece. Its deep intensity and most penetrating details about the lives in Indian village is unique in world literature. The novel is per se a cruel story of annihilation of Indian peasant against whom all the wicked social forces of the rural world conspire, the rich farmers, the priests, the government officials, the zamindars, money lenders and the institution of village justice. It is at the same time a tragedy of debts. The author had himself undergone the excruciating experiences of debts at the time the novel was being written and this comes brilliantly alive when he paints the bitter picture of rural indebtedness without exaggeration.

The reigning theme of *Godan* is the cow. It is the tragedy of cow with whom begins a series of tragedy of Hori and his family. For a poor Indian villager cow is the wealth. The entire family draws its sustenance from it and uses its bones and skins after the death of the animal. No other animal is of such prodigious utility in the lives of the rural folks. The little devotion that orthodox farmer lavishes on it is insubstantial in light of the great blessings that it confers on him. It is, therefore, no wonder that Hori, the hero of the novel longs to possess a cow and to tether her before his house so that all those passing by could see and hold prosperous opinion about his household. Even after his death it is the charitable offering of a cow to the priest that is considered to accord salvation to his departed soul. The cow is as such the supreme joy, wealth, security, consolation and very dignity of the Indian farmer whose life without it is incomplete. The novel has been thus aptly titled as *Godan*.

Hori is a poor peasant of Belari village in Oudh. He owns five bighas of land whose yield he has to part away every year for paying land revenue and

the interest to the creditors. He is around forty and his wife, Dhaniam is thirty six. But both look older than their age. Dhaniam was a charming woman some years ago but has turned weak, haggard and oldish with hair going grey. As without income she finds it hard to feed the children, she reacts fiercely when the village folks take away whatever little she has in her house. Hori who is crushing under heavy debts due to piling interests of the money lenders and the ruthless exacting of land revenue by the men of the zamindar grows spleenish when he even beats his wife, Dhaniam. She knows his plight and endures calmly. The couple had six children of whom three died in their infancy due to medical neglect as they did not have money to provide for medicine. They have now three children; the eldest Gobar is a son. He is sixteen. The other two are daughters; the elder Rupa of twelve and Sona of eight.

Occasionally Hori has been meeting the zamindar, Raisahib Amarपाल Singh who lives at Semri, some five miles from his own village. Hori believes that occasional meeting with the zamindar is in his interest; the zamindar will be generous to him and his family and the village folks will also have some regard for him on account of his apparent closeness with the zamindar. Hori is partly true and partly incorrect; Raisahib does talk to him freely and confides in him about his needs and plans but he does so to ensure his own interests and not of the poor peasants, the least of Hori's. One day he goes to see the zamindar when on the way he meets Bhola, the milkman who approaches towards him with his cows. Bhola is an elderly widower but crazy to marry some woman again if he can get hold of one somewhere. Hori praises his cows and flatters the milkman profusely. His own dream has been to possess a cow. He has been cherishing the day when the cow would be standing on his door and the children would have some iota of milk. During the talk Bhola bemoans that all his wealth and the plenty of milk is useless without a wife at home. Hori suggests a woman in his in-laws' village whose husband has deserted her and gone to Calcutta, she is now alone living on her own toil. It enflames Bhola's passion and he at once offers the cow Hori has set his eyes on. Hori makes it plain he has no money. But to make him morally bound to get him a woman, Bhola insists Hori to take the cow. He agrees to part with the cow in lieu of fodder. Hori assures him that he would even otherwise give him fodder if he is in need of it. Bhola is determined to win Hori and declares, "The cow is yours. You may have her any day." Hori knows that it is not for the fodder that he is giving him the cow but for his

craze to get a wife. And before they part Bhola does remind him not to forget about his problem.

Zamindar Raisahib has been already thinking about Hori when the latter makes his salutations to him. Raisahib is a unique blend of modernity and antiquity. He wears khadi and has taken part in the freedom movement for which he even went to jail renouncing the membership of the legislative council. He is soft-spoken and takes substantial interest in music and literature. His wife died some ten years ago leaving the tiny daughter under his care. Raisahib did not remarry. Although he made no concession in the levy to the peasants, however, hard-pressed they were, the people considered him a generous man and attributed all compulsions and coersions for the recovery of land revenue to the agents. Raisahib informs Hori that a drama is to be staged. A large number of officials, aristocrats and the relations would be visiting on the occasion. All this would involve some twenty thousand rupees. The arrangement for the money has to be done within a week. Hori must convince the peasants about the good cause for which the money is to be raised. He stresses Hori that his village must donate atleast five hundred rupees. Hori who has been listening to the devout thoughts of Raisahib now witnesses a contrary aspect of the zamindar. The peon comes to announce that the forced labourers have refused to work until they are given their food. The zamindar bursts out, "Come, I will set these wicked men right. When they were never given to eat, why this new demand now ? They will get the usual one-anna a day wage which they have been always getting. And they will have to work on this wage whether willingly or unwillingly."

There is great rejoicing in Hori's family when the cow comes to his house. Dhania is deliriously excited at this achievement. "Today the greatest longing of my life is fulfilled," she says. She ties a black rag to the cow so that no evil eye can harm the precious animal. She insists the cow to be tethered in the courtyard because she fears there would be many envious in the village and may do some harm to the cow. According to the custom of the village everyone comes to see the cow, Sundaria, and congratulates Hori's family. The envious brothers of Hori, Hira and Sobha abstain away in disgust and jealousy. Hori thinks or pretends to think that the brothers have not heard about the news and decides to invite them personally. When he reaches their house he happens to overhear the capricious talk that is going on between Hira and Sobha. Hira argues that Hori has concealed the money of their father at the time of division, by which he is buying such things as the cow now.

Hori is upset because he has reared the two brothers with his hard toil. He cannot bear to hear such ungrateful words of the two and to remove the misunderstanding he decides to return the cow to Bhola. But Dhanias insists that the cow cannot be returned and Hori has to finally give in.

Raisahib's grand function comes through well. Peasants have been squeezed to donate for his function. Hori has himself paid five rupees and acted in his play in the role of a gardener. Raisahib lives in a village. He also keeps his ties with the town, Lucknow. He has already been a member of Legislative Council and has to seek re-election to the Council. In his coterie are Dr. Mehta, a professor of philosophy and Miss Malti, a lady doctor who runs her clinic in Lucknow. She has spent many years in England. She is very fashionable and takes all care to look charming and smart. She likes to be flattered by men and aspires them to hover round her. To her, woman is not for marriage and pregnancy but to enjoy life as freely as they can. She discusses the man-woman relationship at length with Dr. Mehta. There is Mr. Khanna an industrialist who is a manager of a large bank and owner of a sugar factory. He likes to flirt with young girls who loom over his social circle. His wife Govindi is very much pained at his infidelity. She is of conventional ideals and considers husband to be next to God for a woman. There is Omkarnath, the editor of *Bijali* with his extraordinary courage to expose the misdeeds of the government and does not mind if he has suffered on this account. He is faithful to the people and would remain so even if he has to go to jail for this purpose. And yet he has to compromise with Raisahib to keep his paper alive. Mirza Khurshed is a devout Sunni Muslim who has been cheated badly by his business acquaintances and friends and finally lives on a shoe shop which he has opened with the help of Raisahib and some other well wishers. He does well in his business. "The convivialities at Raisahib's house have been followed by a game of hunting next day. In the forest Miss Malti comes emotionally close to Dr. Mehta. Mr. Khanna is furious over Miss Malti's coldness towards him. The hunting adventure exposes Khanna's cowardice and hollowness. He rather utilizes the game to incite Raisahib to join his sugar business. The happiest man in the hunting is Mirza Khurshed who willingly gives away the prize of hunting to the villagers whom he also feeds in a grand feast; their first ever happiness in life.

Hori's brother Hira has bowed to kill the cow and one day he succeeds to poison her. Hori has confirmed suspicion on the brother and discloses it

casually to the wife. Dhania makes hue and cry for it. People come to know about the criminal. Killing of cow is not a small thing. It is sacriligious. Hira's absconding soon after the cow's death leaves no doubt to the villagers that he is the killer of the cow. The police inspector comes to search his house. But Hori cannot bear this insult for his brother and borrows thirty rupees from the biggest money lender of the village Jhinguri Singh to bribe the inspector. The police inspector accepts the bribe and recovers further more from others, Datadin, Nokheyram and Pateshwar before leaving for his home. Hori who is already down under the debts on account of his brother's deed has to work now on Hira's field, in order to avoid public criticism. With the result, his own crop fails while Hira's fields yield abundantly. Gobar who has been in the meanwhile carrying on with Bhola's daughter, Jhunias vanishes from the village. Jhunias is pregnant for five months. Even though Hori and Dhanias are enraged at the event they cannot help give shelter to the girl who falls on the feet of Hori. "Father I have no place other than your house. You may kill me, butcher me, but don't please spurn me from your door." The entire village turns against Hori. Hori is dislodged from the community. No one smokes with him. No one drinks water in his house. The villagers cannot tolerate to see that Jhunias is sheltered in his house. They at once summon a panchayat in which all those village leaders who themselves had some blot or other in their own lives sit as panch. Hori is fined one hundred rupees with three mound of grains. Hori silences the protest of Dhanias and agrees to pay the fine because he believes it is the opinion of the community and there is no place for a peasant outside the community (biradari). "Pancho", he says, "whatever we have, it is in the barn. We haven't taken a grain to our home. Whatever you want take from it. If you want to have all, please have all. We are at the mercy of God. If still you run short, please take our oxen." "No one is moved with pity that the poor farmer has to feed his children and wife till next harvest. Hori himself shifts the grain from the barn to Jhinguri Singh's house. And still eighty rupees remain to be paid for which he has to mortgage his house with Jhinguri Singh. At this ironical situation there comes a little happiness in the house. Jhunias gives birth to a son.

Bhola is furious with Hori because the latter has not yet found a bride for him. On the top of it his son has surreptitiously married his daughter. He demands eighty rupees, the cost of the cow. He takes away the oxen since Hori has no money to pay. Without oxen Hori becomes jobless since he cannot plough his field any more. Matadin who had been prying on Jhunias

for quite some time takes this opportunity to exploit Hori's poverty in two ways. He gives loan of seeds and foodgrain to recover later several fold and finds an entry into Hori's house to be able to talk to Jhunias when she is alone. Hardly does the harvest grow Mangru Shah demands Hori to pay his debt. Hori had borrowed twentyfive rupees ten years ago which has grown with interest to three hundred rupees. Hori gets one hundred twenty rupees in the sugarcane cultivation. But soon as he comes out from the sugar mill with the money, Jhinguri Singh grabs and snatches away ninety five rupees from him. Hori goes little farther when Nokheyram lays his hands on the remanent twentyfive rupees. Deprived of his house and oxen, Hori has now no recourse but to work as labourer. His entire family, Dhanias, Sona, Rupa and he himself now work as farm labourers in the service of Matadin.

Gobar has spent in the meanwhile about a year in Lucknow. For some time he worked in Mirza Khurshid's house. Later he opened petty shops according to seasonal demands and made some money. He earned some three rupees a day and saved enough to lend money on interest. He can now afford to maintain his wife and the child and visits the village where he learns the harrowing incidents of the house. He gets back the oxen from Bhola who now softens to see that Gobar has made a place in the society. Gobar cannot endure his father being exploited by the money lenders and the agents of the zamindar. Hori has not collected any receipts for the revenue payment because no farmer in the village does that. When the agents make false claims that the land revenue has not been paid by Hori, Gobar threatens to complain to Raisahib. He proves forcefully that being in Lucknow he knows more closely the zamindar than any one in the village. The agents are at once alarmed and admit the mischief. Gobar's next encounter is with Datadin according to whose calculation Hori owes him two hundred rupees for the amount of thirty rupees he borrowed some eight years ago. Gobar has been himself a money lender in Lucknow. He makes the calculations and points out that his father owes him just sixty six rupees for which he can allow him a generous seventy rupees. Hori, however, goes subsequently to apologize Gobar's act and promises to pay all that is due from him, Gobar evinces that like this there is no end of paying the debts. His father would borrow and pay and still it would remain unpaid. He fears all this debt will be recovered from him. He decides to leave the village with his wife, Jhunias. Dhanias fears that Gobar has been instigated by Jhunias and blurts out her allegation. It worsens the situation. In a fit of anger Gobar takes away his wife and the child to

Lucknow.

Raisahib in the meanwhile has had a series of problems. His daughter, Meenakshi is now eighteen whose marriage will take a toll of one lakh rupees. He resolves to marry her to Kunwar Digvijay Singh even if he is a widower and addicted to all sorts of vices. His next problem is to get elected to the Council. This has become a prestige issue because Raja Suryapratap Singh has challenged to defeat him in the field. He has been already twice elected to the Council and did not have much attraction for it. But his friend, Tankha had advised him to stand for the election and to withdraw later on a bribe of one lakh rupees from Raja Suryapratap Singh. Tankha had even claimed that he had already discussed it with Suryapratap Singh who would willingly give one lakh rupees for withdrawing. He has, however, now vowed to defeat Raisahib at any cost. Raisahib's final problem is to get hold of the property of his father-in-law's estate as his brother-in-law who managed the estate has recently died. His misery is that Khanna and Tankha whom he regarded as his close friends are bent upon to fleece him.

Hori hopes to get a good crop of sugarcane and has planned to marry his daughter this season. Dulari has promised to lend him two hundred rupees seeing the promising crop in the field. But there are no dearth of people to envy his happiness. Hori owes one hundred and fifty rupees to Mangru Shah who has been not very serious to recover the money at once. The village patwari (record keeper) provokes Mangru Shah to file suit against Hori to recover the loan. With their manipulation a decree is issued for auctioning of Hori's standing crop. Hori has no choice but to mortgage his lands. He is, however, rescued at this moment by Nohri, whom Bhola has in the meanwhile married. She lends Hori two hundred rupees though she makes much show of it in the village to get public glory for the kindness.

When Gobar returns to Lucknow he finds things have changed. At the place he used to run his stall someone else has opened his shop and the people have forgotten about him. He works strenuously in the factory and turns cynical towards his wife. His son dies after a brief illness. Gobar takes to drinking. Jhunia gives birth to another son and is helped by an old lady Chunia. The sugar mill run by Khanna decides to impose a cut in the labourers' wages. Mirza Khurshid and Omkarnath, the editor of *Bijali* exhort the workers to go on strike. The workers obstruct the new workers recruited by the mill which leads to violence. Mirza Khurshid is attacked and Gobar runs for his help. In the process he is himself severely beaten. He is nursed by

his wife and financially helped by Chunia which softens his attitude towards the wife. He swears, "Now I shall never beat Jhunia." A fire breaks out in the sugar mill. Within minutes the mill is perished to ashes. Khanna goes broke. He is, however, fully sympathised by his wife Govindi who boosts his morale. Khanna sets up another mill with his usual courage and ingenuity. There is in the meantime a change of attitude in Malti. She decides to devote to social work and gives up her idle living for luxury.

Raisahib Amarpal Singh has all his dreams fulfilled. He has not only been elected to the council, he is now the home member and even more powerful than before. He has won the case and has acquired the ownership of the estate of his father -in-law. But he has fumbled on the question of his daughter's marriage. Raja Suryapratap Singh in the meanwhile had consented to his son Rudrapal Singh's marriage with Raisahib's daughter Meenakshi. Rudrapal Singh who is a student of M.A. is a bold and defiant boy and does not agree with the father. He marries Saroj, sister of Malti. And ultimately Raisahib has to marry Meenakshi to Digvijay Singh.

The novel eventually draws to a pathetic end. When it becomes impossible to feed the family on the yield of the land or the drudgery of the land lords, Hori becomes a labourer on the construction work of a road beside his village. At night he makes ropes to supplement his income. Working half-starved and without sleep he becomes miserably weak and frail. One day when it is the hottest day of summer he suffers sun-stroke and feels giddy. On that fateful day he has avoided to drink water on empty stomach. But now he cannot help and runs to drink water to his fill. Suddenly he falls unconscious on the earth. He has the vivid memories of gay moments of life emerging before his eyes on the dying moment. Among these reveries is the vision of a cow, Kamdhenu, the heavenly cow that fulfills all human wishes. Within moments he expires with tears rolling down his cheeks muttering his last words of earthly existence. "Forgive me Dhaniam, if I have ever hurt you... We are all ruined. Now let me die. The news of Hori's death soon spreads. The people throng over the place and advise Dhaniam to give a cow in charity so that Hori's soul may attain salvation. An ordinary village woman would have borrowed money again from the money lenders to offer the cow. But Dhaniam is extraordinary and kicks the mortifying tradition with her feet. She brings the twenty annas that Hori has earned by making ropes. She gives the money to the priest with emphatic statement. "There is neither cow in the home, nor a heifer nor any money. All that there is in home are these coins and this is

his 'godan'."

Premchand was an excellent creator of sub-plots. These sub-plots heighten the significance of main plots and advance the story through multiple dimensions towards the end. The author's earlier concern of struggle for freedom gives way to the primary concern of survival. *Godan* depicts the two worlds of rich aristocracy and wretched poverty. There is crooked exploitation in either classes. The world of Hori is inhabited by Dhanias, Gobars, Hiras, Datadins, Matadins, Bholas, and Jhinguri Singh. The world of upper class is that of mill owner Khanna, Dr. Mehta, Miss Malti, Raja Suryapratap Singh, Mirza Khurshid and Tankha. The author has achieved splendid success in drawing the pictures of two world with vivid objectivity.

Hori's sufferances symbolize the sufferances of agrarian India. He is the first peasant hero not only in Premchand's canon but in the entire range of Hindi fiction whose patient, endless and silent sufferance exalts him to such a height where he receives measureless sympathy, pity and love of the readers and dies a martyr to the cause of human survival. The blind beggar of *Rangabhoorni* demonstrated one extreme of protest with his immense power to move people in his favour, the wretched farmer of *Godan* is at another extreme end of exemplifying infinite endurance without slightest protest whatsoever. Hori's love for the land is not just for his living but to preserve his cultural identity for which he fights till he falls. The cow, land and oxen are the life of a peasant and Hori pays all prices to preserve them but loses before the heartless forces of the village folks. He has to maintain a large family of five to six people and when deprived of all means of earning he works on the road construction and makes ropes in the night for some extra income. Tortured by the money lenders, oppressed by village upper castes, mauled in his own web of orthodox beliefs he dies like the millions of farmers who have died in the same grind mill of oppression. In the beginning he is a farmer and turns a worker in the end. Between the two ends his life portrays the tragedy of dispossession which in the history of exploitation points the process of conversion of farmers to workers.

If Hori is the symbol of the tolerance of exploitation and sufferance and of orthodox faith in the feudal order of society his wife Dhanias symbolises revolt and protest against tyranny and oppression. She makes forceful demands of his rights and fights unflinchingly to safeguard them. She symbolises the awakening in the peasant class. In the earlier part of the novel it is she who fights for rights while in the later it is her son Gobar who takes

the place. But whereas she is a failure Gobar achieves success to a considerable degree. In *Dhaniala*, Premchand has created a memorable character in the world of fiction whose each action and speech demonstrate the pitiable way a village woman is struggling to preserve her family and its meagre possession. She flaunts the wicked village jury and so the money lenders and is prepared to pay any price for it. She refuses to die inch by inch like Hori and makes all our effort to settle the things at one stroke. Hori can compromise though without compromising with his orthodox ideals. But *Dhaniala* gives a brave fight to oppose the forces of destruction. She is not confined to her kitchen but works shoulder to shoulder with her husband in the field, in the home and lends strength to the family. She has the primary pride and intelligence of India's women folks. Cow is the auspicious wealth of a rural family and, accordingly, there is no end of her joy when the cow arrives in her house. She is furious when the cow is killed by her brother-in-law, Hira and is full of contempt when her husband gives false witness against her even swearing on the son to save his brother in the public crime of killing a cow. She can alone fight against the vicious forces of the village and outwits all and sundry who oppose her. The village folks are too scared to face her verbal duel. Her spirit of fathomless charity amidst tearing poverty is seen in her ready willingness to give shelter even to her enemy's daughter. She is as tender in her heart as she is fiercely tough outwardly. She respects the ideal goodness of her husband and supports him even when she knows the husband is leading the family to catastrophic end by his sheer folly. She is a down-to-earth realist and is conscious of hard truths of life. She advises, accordingly, to oppose the justice to her husband for whom, however, opposition is as foreign as tolerance is to her. The author has made her full of flesh and blood. She has also the essential weaknesses and strengths of a peasant woman. She is unequalled in all women characters of Premchand. She wins sympathy of the readers as a wife, mother, mother-in-law and a woman folk of an Indian village. It is she who ultimately silences the religious exploiters who conspire to fleece her when she has not even proper clothes on her body let alone money. At the extreme height of her grief on the death of her husband, her misery and helplessness the village priests demand present of a cow in charity for the salvation of Hori's soul. She cuts quickly with her ready wit and prudence and hands over the twenty annas (one and a quarter of a rupee) to the priests as 'Godan' before fainting over the corpse of her husband.

Hori's son Gobar represents the millions of dispossessed farmers who are fleeing the villages even today to find a tolerable life in the towns. He is the herald of the farmers-turned-workers. He works in a mill and even lends money on interest. He is conscious of his power and though revolts in the villages he silently accepts the way of life in the town. Yet he cannot revolt in the town and cannot unite the workers and farmers to fight the repression either in the village or the town. It is his ironic comment that brings out the vicious personality of Raisahib who is one of the many sympathy seeking zamindars and is totally blind to the miseries of poor farmers though proclaiming all sense of charity and benevolence. "Those who are in sad plight", says Gobar "don't keep dozens of cars, they don't live in palaces, they don't feed upon rich viands (Halwa-puri). Nor do they go in for the delights of dance and music. They are enjoying the princely joys and on the top of it cry that they are unhappy."

Raisahib's character is that of a successful careerist before whom the urban counterpart Khanna glows dim. His fake pronouncements of zamindari system vanish in the air so on as one sees him reacting violently against the forced labourers. His representation in the council or going to jail are to gain power and prestige and not to serve the people in any way. Dr. Mehta's character makes a little departure from Raisahib. He is against the exploitation but with full sympathy with the exploiters. He, however, has courage and strength to expose the fake postures of Raisahib because unlike Hori he does not live on the mercy of Raisahib. But just as Gobar is a failure in the working class, Dr. Mehta is a flop in the elite class. The author seems to suggest that the exploitation and the foreign rule can be eliminated only when the two, who symbolise action and thought, can unite together. Raisahib's urban counterpart is the industrialist Chandra Prakash Khanna who demands unquestionable obedience from the workers and has the audacity to enforce it over the semi-starving workers because he knows the workers are helpless in the bitter market of unemployment. The author has summed up his traits in few words; "He had been twice in prison. He never bowed before anyone. He wore khadi and drank French wine." Miss Malti with whom Dr. Mehta has Platonic love has imbibed the lopsided perversion of the European education. In her transformation to take life meaningfully useful to others she emerges as a potential woman of modern education that is capable of reforming.

Godan is thus the saga of Indian peasant life with glowing flashes of the

urban counterpart. In this masterpiece of epic proportion the author has presented with photographic details the full view of Indian peasants in the fourth decade of present century. There are nevertheless long dialogues and disturbing exposition of theories and ideologies but these offer sharp comments over the spirit and sensibility of the age and also render an insight into the habits and manners of the people of the time. As ever Premchand had tremendous power of colloquial idiom and its effective use in the novel makes language alive and kicking. The atmosphere of the novel is that of a placid ocean bracing below all the harshness of the nature as may be seen in the speech and action of Hori who appears from the beginning of the novel as a person quite exhausted and accepts life with calm resignation. The overall effect of characterization, portrayal of life and the wonderful presentation of intrinsic situations make the novel the best work of Premchand and also the best novel of rural India.

During six years preceding the appearance of *Godan* Premchand wrote numerous short stories in which he not only showed the excellence of skill and ingenuity and a high purpose of theme but also made some experiments in the genre that mark a new breakthrough in the style of short story writing. These stories include; *Thakur Ka Kuan* (The Well of the Village Head), *Pandit Moteram Ki Dairy*, *Bade Bhai Sahab* (The Elder Brother), *Lottery*, *Kafan* (The Shroud) and *Rahsya* (Mystery).

Among these *Kafan* is the most famous and perhaps the best story of Premchand. In it the irony surpasses all human confines. The story depicts the father and son, Ghisu and Madhav who are so crushed in poverty that they have no meaning in the accepted norms of the society. They become neither beasts nor men; because they seem to grow barren of all feelings. Madhav's wife writhes in labour while the husband and the father-in-law (Ghisu) roast potatoes outside the room. They have stolen the potatoes from the neighbour's field and would prefer to feast over them to attending the dying woman. Both are known for their atrocious laziness. Madhav even desires his wife to die so that it sets the end of all matter. But then he is also afraid that in his absence the father may eat away the potatoes and so when they eat potatoes and rejoice in chit-chat the woman dies in the room. Next day they discover that the woman has died. They scream and weep so that everyone in the village may hear and rush to help. Everyone knows that they are sinister scoundrels and yet no one can be as heartless to see the corpse lying without cremation. The father and the son go to the zamindar to plead

for money for cremation. Other villagers also help them. They raise some five rupees and set out to buy a shroud (Kafan) for the dead woman. Ghisu suggests that they buy some cheap cloth because as Madhav puts in, it will be dark by the time the body is lifted and no one would know then the quality of the cloth. Ghisu explains that it is a foolish custom to spend so expensively just over the shroud. On the way they find a liquor shop and look at each other. Both make their way to the shop and buy a bottle of cheap country wine. They drink and discuss the dead woman. Both admire her. Madhav, the husband says she was a good wife who even in her dying saw that they are well feasted. He informs the father that his wife will surely go to heaven and become a rani therein. The father too agrees and says that the woman has been lucky to free herself from the bond of maya (illusion). They eat puris, fried liver and pickle to their fill and devour the entire bottle. Their worry is now how to explain about the money to the people. They decide to concoct that the money has fallen from Ghisu's waistband. They are sure the orthodox village folks even if furious over them, shall surely get another shroud for the cremation. They get completely drunk. They sing and dance and jump and make eyes at each other before finally falling unconscious before the liquor shop.

XIV

End of an Era

Premchand was working on his next and the last novel *Mangal Sutra* when in mid June he fell on bed. He came from the town and complained of stomach pain. He was feeling immensely thirsty. He took homoeopathic and then allopathic treatment but could not get any relief. On 18 June 1936 when the condolence meeting on the death of Gorky was organised in the office of *Aaj* he decided to read his speech. He prepared it despite his inability even to stand. He was miserably shivering in the meeting and, therefore, could not read the speech himself. On 25 June he vomitted blood. He felt as though his end was approaching fast and, therefore, he was impatient all the more to complete the works in his hand. Despite treatment the blood vomit did not subside. He wrote to Akhtar Hussain Raipuri on July 28, "Now listen to my story. I am ill for about a month. I am suffering from gastric ulcer and vomiting blood. I am, therefore, unable to work. Treatment is on though without avail till now. If I am alive I shall definitely bring out the *Bism Sadi..*" He went to Lucknow for treatment where about ten days were spent in the tests before the treatment could start. He stayed in the house of his old friend Kripa Shankar Nigam and later in Surya Hotel in Aminabad. His ailment revealed a number of complications including gastric ulcer, dropsy and hardening of liver. Premchand decided not to waste time and moved back to Varanasi. He shifted to an old house that belonged to the famous writer Bhartendu Harishchandra in the airy atmosphere outside the town. A number of friends visited him in these last days among whom were Jaya Shankar Prasad, Suryakant Tripathi Nirmala, Daya Shankar Nigam and Jainendra Kumar. He was constantly concerned at this time about *Hans* which had been asked to deposit security for publishing *Sidhnat Swatantrya* by Seth Govind Das. *Hans* was being brought out now by Sahitya Parishad which refused to pay the security. Premchand could not tolerate to see the closure of the paper at any cost and, therefore, himself paid the security and took back the journal.

The tortuous severity of the illness, however, did not sap the strength and zeal of Premchand's writing. He was working against all odds on his last

testaments *Mangal Sutra* and the critical essay *Mahajani Sabhyata* (Trading Civilization). In the end he was thoroughly disillusioned of the new social order. He became severely critical of the capitalists. "The trading civilization does not have any cure for the envy, coercion, dishonesty, falsity, allegations and counter allegations, whoredom, thefts, robberies, atrocities and so on." Premchand was never a religious person in the accepted spirit of the world. He made pronounced expression about it in his death bed to Jainendra. "At such time people remember God. People also remind me about it. But so far I haven't felt the necessity to bother God." He often recited the poems of Iqbal in these last days. He had lost all faith in idealism. "Idealism will not help," he told Jainendra the night before his death. And all these came to an end next morning when his condition worsened. At about eight in the morning on 8 October 1936 Premchand breathed his last. Not even thirty people accompanied the bier of the greatest novelist to the cremation wharf. His death at the prime age of fifty six marked the end of an era in the realm of Hindi literature.

As has been said Premchand could not live to complete his last novel *Mangal Sutra* (The Wedding Necklace). The hero of the novel, Dev Kumar, according to Amritrai, is the author himself. The story of the novel as we have it does not amply justify the title. Premchand, it seems, had a massive plot scheme for this novel and the suggestion for the title was to emerge toward the end. But then this is a mere speculation. Premchand wrote some seventy pages forming four chapters of the novel. It depicts the story of Dev Kumar, a writer of great originality. He has enriched the literature with his esteemed writings and won great fame. But his books have not brought any money. He is of course not very much perturbed about it. His great ambition is to settle down at the fag end of his life in a peaceful place where he may devote to creative writing, social service and scholarship without having to worry about the diurnal turbulence of living. But he finds a different atmosphere in his family. His eldest son Sanat Kumar opposes the idealism of the father. He wants to enjoy life with material comforts. His wife, Shaivya, too is cold to his idealism. Sanat Kumar is a lawyer and uses all means to promote his cause. He even turns hostile to the father who has sold the ancestral land. The younger son, Sadhu Kumar is an idealist and respects the ideas of his father. This lends some relief to Dev Kumar. But Dev Kumar is shocked to see the course of the world and his idealism is shaken at its reflection. He is lost in utter perplexion. The story was intercepted here with

the author's death. Premchand's battering attack on the capitalist order of society finds forceful expression in the novel. Dev Kumar is the spokesman of the author's philosophy. Author's own comments on the thoughts and personality of Dev Kumar reinforce the latter's critical attitude to capitalism. Significantly the hero lost all spiritual or religious values with his growing antipathy towards the capitalist class.

Mangal Sutra if completed would have revealed a new dimension to Premchand's attitude to life. He had manifestly planned to depict the cream of his life's experiences in it. It has been averred that Premchand designed the novel as an urban counterpart of *Godan*. The assumption, therefore, is not without meaning that the most orthodox and gentle hero like Hori would have taken a shape of a virulent iconoclast in the urban transformation.

Epilogue

Premchand's writing career as a Hindi novelist extends over a period of some twenty years from *Sewa Sadan* to *Godan*. As a writer his works spanned over four decades from the beginning of the century. Before *Sewa Sadan* and after it, he wrote not only short stories and plays but scores of essays and commentaries that occupy the massive corpus of his literary output. He translated abundantly though on his sheer economic needs. These translations are marked by his excellent grasp of idiom and superb transcreation of the spirit of the original. Most of his works have been discussed in the preceding pages. A brief account of his translations will not be out of place here.

A conscientious and gifted translator Premchand strove to introduce to his Hindi readers the best of Urdu or English writings which he had read for his own pleasure or for which there was demand from the journals. He translated a number of Bengali works into Urdu including the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore. He confessed that he was influenced by Tagore for his stories. His Hindi translation of Ratannath Sarsar's Urdu work *Fasan-e-Azad* under the title of *Azad Katha* is a masterpiece by itself. He was deeply influenced by Tolstoy and had translated scores of his stories into Urdu. Among his other translations into Urdu are Charles Dickens' *The Story of Richard Doubledick* under the title of *Ashk-e-Nadamat* (Tears of Shame), Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sightless*, Galsworthy's *Justice*, *The Silver Box* and *Strife*. To his Hindi readers he introduced Anatole France's *Thais* under the title of *Ahankar* and George Eliot's *Silas Marner* under the title of *Sukhadas*. He attached a due importance to translation and knew the demands and difficulties of a translation of excellent quality. He even mooted the formation of the translator's guild which would ensure the rights of translators for quality translations into Hindi or Urdu.

Premchand wrote innumerable articles and book reviews in various journals all of which are not traceable today. These articles are on a variety of subjects including politics, history, ancient culture, scriptures, painting,

education, literature and society. Premchand's interests were wide but he did not enjoy the elite literature or elite school of fine arts. He was impressed by the contemporary life more so that depicted the agony of poor masses. His articles as such bear topical value and display great insight and knowledge not only of literature and history but also the wide socio-economic and political developments of the time. Some of the journals for which he wrote regularly are; *Zamana*, *Hamdard*, *Kahkashan*, *Azad*, *Subh-e-Ummid*, *Pratap*, *Chand*, *Maryada*, *Swadesh*, *Jan Bharati*, *Aaj*, *Madhuri*, *Hans* and *Jagaran*. A handful of these writings have been compiled and re-edited by his son, Amritrai and have been published in three volumes.

Premchand also made a notable contribution to children's literature. He prepared text books for children's education and saw to it how best material could be made available to them. These books were published by Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow. Writing about the problems of best choice for children he informed Nigam in his letter of 27 June 1932, "As far as fifth, sixth and seventh standards are concerned I have to face such difficulties. My endeavour has been to make choice from renowned figures." He wrote the classic story of *Ramayana* in simple language in his book *Ramcharcha*. His another book *Backmalon Ke Darshan* which was published by Lala Ramnarayan Lal of Allahabad was taught for several years in the schools of the United Provinces.

Premchand wrote some two hundred and fifty short stories all of which are not traceable today. Amritrai has listed some 224 short stories in his biography, *Premchand: Qalam Ka Sipahi*. These stories are in Hindi and Urdu and appeared in the anthologies namely; *Soz-e- Watan*, *Sapta-Saroj*, *Navanidhi*, *Prem Pachisi* (Prem Prason), *Prem Battisi*, *Firdaus-e-Khyal* and *Mansarovar*. A brief comment has been attempted on some of these works in the preceding pages in the order of chronology. These stories are built on the theme of the basic human weaknesses and the virtues as also on the theme of political awakening against the foreign rule. He took the situations and characters from real life for which his stories not only move us deeply but are also greatly relevant to us even with changing socio-economic ethos. Talking about his stories he said, "In my view the plots of stories should be taken from real life and should solve the problems of real life." The secret of Premchand's success is that he knew his subject matter well and identified his characters with real life.

Premchand wrote sixteen novels in Hindi and Urdu including his

unfinished work *Mangal Sutra*. The remarkable feature of these novels is the splendid sweep and range of his subject matter and the huge canvasses on which he constructed his plots. No other author has been able to handle such a large material in his novels with artistic ingenuity and technical skill. There is vigour and sharpness in his expression. At one place he pointed out that he wished to write novels and stories with masculine vigour and, therefore, could not bear the fiminism in expression. The depth of his feeling, therefore, is blended with fierceness. There was no mellowness in his emotion and this bespeaks his scarce delineation of nature. But then this is not to argue that Premchand's novels are immune from any flaws. No novelists can claim absolute perfection and Premchand in this regard was no exception. His large army of characters is not the inevitable requirement of the author. He created them just to portray some 'types' of characters and these have burgeoned disappointing results. But all his characters are not 'types'. They grow with the growth of the novel. This is particularly true of most of his women characters. Suman, Nirmala, Sukhada, Jalpa or even Dhanika are not the same in the end as they appear in the beginning of the novels. The criticism, therefore, that Premchand's characters are 'flat' is without substance. Premchand sought to create in his novels the world in its totality and this was not possible in his scheme without superabundance of characters for which he drew even his minor characters with equal zeal, force and patience. Exuberance of co-incidences, long dialogues and interpolating comments also characterize his novels and stories which compel the impatient readers to skip off the pages. The disappointing feature accepted, we must judge them in the total effects the novels produce and such results are far more satisfying than feared. The marvel of Premchand's novels (the later ones) is that they are not insipidly flat like those of C. P. Snow but present a surface which is at once plain and impressively rugged like that of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

The great tradition that Premchand left in the literature of masses cannot be seen in isolation of his notable contribution to Hindustani language. One can read his passages just for the pleasure of reading. There is sweeping spontaneity and great vigour of expression. He chose words from peoples' language and kept alive the colloquial flavour with verbal facility. The words of Persian derivation which he used freely in Hindi added a prurient force to his expression. In doing so he made Hindi not only acceptable to the vast multitudes of his readers but also enriched and enlarged the scope of Hindi. It was a great revolutionary contribution of Premchand and the Hindi language

as we have it today is incontrovertibly the legacy of the great novelist.

There is an undercurrent of all-embracing compassion in his depiction. The basic philosophy of his life was humanism but it was his practical humanism. He sought to serve some utility without delving into the recesses of human psyche in display of abstraction. His delineation of mental states is as such not the study of human psychology but the presentation of human nature which he telescoped in perceptive phenomenon. Alongside his largeness, accordingly, there is minute perception which add vivacity and colour to his writings. Premchand knew the essential evil in human society but this knowledge was not an obsession with him, With his utilitarian approach he sought to show how evil could be eliminated and society could be reformed. His humanism as such was a reformative humanism. With this impulse behind his writing he was essentially an idealist but his idealism had roots in realism. There has been too much noise about the solutions he suggested to the problems like that in *Sewa Sadan*. Such allegations have given little thought that the solution is only elementary to the formidable problems in whose depiction Premchand attempted to provoke his readers about the evil of the society that needed immediate remedy. To Premchand art was not for art's sake. It was primarily utilitarian. He gave a convincing justification about this concept. "The age for 'art for art's sake' is that when the country is prosperous and happy. When we see ourselves imprisoned in various political and social bindings, when we see everywhere the scenes of poverty and sorrow and hear the pathetic wail of peoples' hardships, how then is it possible that a thoughtful man will not be moved !"

It was, therefore, not without purpose that Premchand chose to depict the ruthless exploitation of the poor, particularly the farmers. To some degree his life and writings were similar to that of Charles Dickens. Both had an unhappy childhood. Both depicted the poverty in heart-redning passages as they had experienced that life themselves. But whereas Dickens lived in a free land, Premchand did not. The former could go charactersitically toward optimism. But Premchand who had witnessed more bitter life around him crushed in social and political exploitation could not avoid the inevitable tragic consequences because that would have distorted the real life he wished to portray. Like Tolstoy he attacked the exploitation and took to task the hollowness of the bourgeois class. His bitter hatred to these, is pervading in all his novels and stories. The hatred then assumes myriad dimensions in his works. Explaining about its presence in his writings, he wrote in December

1933 issue of *Hans* : “When there is much significance of hatred in life, how can literature which is the reflection of this life, can be apathetic to it ?” His hatred for communalism and sham cry for linguistic preserve is too eloquent in his writings. He scathingly satirised the communal orthodoxy in *Karmabhoomi* and *Godan*. It also relates to inter-religious misfeeling as demonstrated in *Rangabhoomi* and even in the last play *Prem Ki Vedi*. Speaking in his editorial in *Jagarcn* on 29 August 1932 he said, “This mental attitude (communalism) chokes the very spirit of nationalism. We have to rootout this attitude else our country will be sweet only in dream.” Similarly he strove to demolish the differences between Urdu and Hindi. Perhaps no other writer has shown such great concern to bring about a rapport between the two linguistic classes.

The social reform of Premchand was reinforced with his powerful endeavour to generate a political awakening in the masses. His greatest dream was the independence of the country. At the same time he wanted the economic freedom for his countrymen. Replying about his great desire in life he said in June 1930, “My desires are limited. My greatest desire now is that we achieve victory in our freedom struggle.” When way back in 1923 he wrote to Nigam that he belonged to no party it was because he felt that the parties were subordinating the peoples’ needs and causes to their own personal interests. For Premchand, people were foremost since he was, like Gorky the writer of the people. He could not bear to see the vast economic disparity which the emerging capitalism was ushering into Indian society by which only the poor masses were victimised. He condemned this heartless capitalist order in one of his last testaments *Mahajani Sabhyata* published a month before his death in September 1936 issue of *Hans*.

Premchand’s literary career marks a full circle; beginning with political theme of *Soz-e-Watan* he voyaged across the themes of social reform of *Sewa Sadan* and the class war of *Rangabhoomi* to the political theme in *Karmabhoomi*. The last novel, his magnum opus, *Godan* where the political theme is still alive is, however, constructed on a higher plane of the basic issue of human survival in the spirit of *Weltschmerz*. He was, in between, influenced by Gandhism and extended his all-out support to Gandhiji’s role in national freedom. It, however, disappointed him to see how the rich bourgeois class was harvesting their personal gains through the false show of Gandhian life. The emergence of new capitalist power all the more disgusted him since it raced indiscriminately to exploit the poor workers and farmers

whose happy life was his cherished goal ever since. He, accordingly, leaned toward socialism and espoused the cause of the poor to wage war against the capitalism. In his writings in the later phase he displayed his faith in Communism with signal disclosures. In his editorial of *Jagaran* he wrote on 28 January 1934: "One who opposes Communism wants to enjoy greater comforts in life than others, he wants to subjugate others in his own self. One who considers himself equal with others has no reason to oppose Communism." The progressive writers at that time were beginning to share these views. Their writings were soon given prominence as works of progressivism. Premchand did not like writing to be tagged with any 'ism' and felt that the use of such epithets was superficial. In his presidential speech at the historic Progressive Writers Conference in Lucknow he said: "In my view such names as the "Progressive Writers Union" is wrong. A writer or an artist is progressive by nature, if this was not his nature he would not be writer at all."

The simplicity and unpretentiousness of life as espoused in Premchand's works have full vindication in his own life. His simplicity and warm hospitality is too well known to the readers of his works. He hated ostentations and condemned the people who displayed it in the marriages and other occasions. He usually avoided the dinner invitations. He was so simple of clothes and appearance that the people who organised functions in his honour failed to recognise him and had to discover to their shocking surprise in the corners of the gathering or some unexpected situation. Though he respected all religions he never believed in any particular religion and even distrusted the existence of God. He condemned the bigotry of not only Hindus but the Muslims and Christians as well. He was as fearless as Kabir in criticising the tyranny of any religion. His distrust of God, religion and even spiritualism is too emphatically dominant in *Godan*. He was as sincere as he felt when he said, "I have no faith in God, no reverence."

But Premchand's was an impressive personality and with his instinctive simplicity and unconscious dignity, he had faith in man. A cheerfully bouyant person he was extremely courteous and smiled full heartedly at all times. His bursts in peals of laughter are well known anecdotes to the readers of his life. With thick moustache and wide awake eyes and exceptionally careless about his clothes he was too soon distinguished from many as an uncommon personality. He was tall and handsome and in his father's words was a 'rose like' adolescent at the time of his marriage. He was fair-complexioned. He

never bowed his head before his demanding superiors. He was a good host taking care of smallest needs of the guests. Though he was deceived for such warmth and friendliness by people he never lost faith in man. He took all care to see that new writers were encouraged and despite his busy schedule wrote to them about their writings. There were writers who carried his letters in their pockets to show proudly to their friends that these were written to them by none but Munshi Premchand. Even when he was criticised he never expressed harsh words. It was because he had the power and capacity to take all in good spirits. He was a true friend and opposed injustice done to his colleagues even if he had to suffer the ire of others or lose his job.

Works of Premchand

Novels

I. Asrar-e-Mauvid (<i>Urdu</i>)	1903-1905 (Serialised)
2. Ham Khurma-Wa-Ham Sawab (<i>Urdu</i>)	1906
3. Prema (<i>Hindi version of Ham Khurma- Wa Ham Sawab</i>)	1907
4. Kishna	1907
5. Roothi Rani	1907 (Serialised)
6. Jalwa-e-Isar (<i>Urdu</i>)	1912
7. Sewa Sadan (Bazar-e-Husn in <i>Urdu</i>)	1919
8. Premashram (Gosha-e-Afiyat in <i>Urdu</i>)	1921
9. Vardan (<i>Hindi version of Jalwa-e-Isar</i>)	1921
10. Rangabhoomi (Chaugan-e-Hasti in <i>Urdu</i>)	1925
11. Kayakalp (Parda-e-Majaz in <i>Urdu</i>)	1926
12. Nirmala	1926 (Serialised)
13. Pratigya (<i>Remodelled version of Prema Bewa in Urdu</i>)	1927
14. Ghaban	1931
15. Karmabhoomi (Maidan-e-Amal in <i>Urdu</i>)	1932
16. Godan (Gaudan in <i>Urdu</i>)	1936
17. Mangal Sutra (Unfinished) Published Posthumously in	1948

Short Story Collection

Hindi

1. Sapta Saroj
2. Agni Samadhi
3. Nav Nidhi
4. Prema
5. Prem Pachisi

6. Prem Poornima
7. Prem Prasoon
8. Prem Teertha
9. Prem Pratima
10. Prem Pramod
11. Prem Dwadashi
12. Prem Panchami
13. Prem Chaturthi
14. Panch Phool
15. Kafan
16. Samar Yatra
17. Mansarovar
(Four parts)

Urdu

1. Soz-e-Watan
2. Prem Pachisi
3. Prem Battisi
4. Prem Chalisa
5. Firdaus-e-Khyal
6. Zad-e-Rah
7. Dukh Ki Keemat
8. Vardat
9. Akhiri Tohafa
10. Khwab-o-Khyal
11. Khak-e-Parwana

Plays

1. Karbala
2. Roohani Shadi
3. Sangram
4. Prem Ki Vedi

Essays

1. Kucch Vichar (Two Parts)

2. Qalam Tyag Aur Talwar

Biographies

1. Mahatma Sheikhadi
2. Durgadas

Translations

1. Tolstoy Ki Kahaniyan
2. Sukhdas
3. Ahankar
4. Chandi Ki Dibiya
5. Nayay
6. Hartal
7. Azad Katha

Children's Books

1. Kuttey Ki Kahani
2. Jangal Ki Kahaniyan
3. Ram Charcha
4. Manmodak

Glossary

Ashram	A charitable home or dwelling of a sage
Charkha	A wooden spinning wheel
Chapati	A thin cake of bread. It constitutes the daily food of most Indian household specially in the north.
Dhoti	An apparel, generally white, worn round down lower half of the body.
Gehun	Wheat
Ghee	Purified butter
Gulli	A popular game in the country side in India.
Danda	
Halwa	A ceremonial dish made of floor sugar and ghee
Hartal	Strike
Holi	A colour festival that falls at the end of winter
Karma	Action
Khadi	Hand-woven cloth popularised by Mahatma Gandhi
Khichri	A concoction of rice and pulses
Munshi	Clerk. It is also referred respectfully to person of Kayastha family. Now it is out of date.
Panch	A village elder who is one of the five judges of Panchayat
Panchayat	A body of five village elders who act as judges to give judgement in village disputes.
Poori	A small fried cake of bread used for special dishes.
Raja	King. Also the lord of the estate (<i>feminine-Rani</i>)
Sadhu	One who has renounced the mundane life for spiritual attainment
Sahib	The term used to designate high-placed persons or officials
Sanyasi	A recluse (<i>feminine-Sanyasini</i>)
Sewa	Service
Swadesh	Of one's own country
Swaraj	Self rule
Tahsildar	An officer for collection of land revenue from farmers.
Vaidya	A physician who practises indigenous system of medicine in India.

Zamindar Land lord or owner of a large estate.

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by Nand Dulare Bajpai
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by Dr Indranath Madan
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by Dr Ram Vilas Sharma
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